

Heart Transplantation

what to expect and resources guidebook



Proven experience and positive outcomes for patients like you.

We're here to help support you throughout your heart transplant journey.

Your heart has carried you through your entire life pumping oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood to your body's cells. For some reason, your heart may now be struggling to continue its life-saving job. If doctors have told you that no other form of medical treatments can be done to repair or improve your heart's function, a heart transplant might be an option for you. And, we are here to guide you through the heart transplant process with hope.





Understanding the miracle of heart transplant.

It sounds like a miracle and, in some ways, it is. A heart transplant can help patients with advanced heart failure by replacing their heart with a healthy, donated heart. It can be recommended by your doctor if he or she feels that there are no other options to treat your heart failure.

During the surgery, your heart is removed and the pumping of blood is rerouted through a bypass machine so that it can continue circulating throughout your body. A healthy heart from a deceased organ donor is then transplanted into your chest and blood flow is again rerouted into the transplanted heart now in your body.

Get back to your life.

The most common reason for a heart transplant is chronic heart failure. Heart failure, usually caused by heart disease, makes the heart muscle too weak to pump enough blood throughout your body.

Some medical treatments or therapies may help treat the symptoms of heart disease, but when it gradually worsens despite treatment, heart disease can become end-stage.

A heart transplant is usually introduced as a treatment option when this end-stage point is near. The good news is that transplantation can offer the potential of living an independent, normal and active life again.

The complex process of a simple heartbeat.

Understanding heart failure

A simple heartbeat is a complex process inside your body. To start, oxygenated blood coming back to your heart from the body and the lungs fills your heart's two upper chambers (the atria). As blood fills the atria, the mitral and tricuspid valves open and blood flows into the lower two chambers (the ventricles).

When your ventricles contract, the mitral and tricuspid valves close. This stops blood from flowing back into the atria and allows it to pump through the pulmonary and aortic valves. Then, the pulmonary valve opens to allow blood to travel from the right ventricle into the pulmonary artery. This artery brings blood to your lungs for oxygen.

At the same time, the aortic valve opens to allow blood to flow from the left ventricle into the aorta, which brings oxygen-rich blood to the body. As the cycle finishes, the ventricles relax and the pulmonary and aortic valves shut tightly.

These valves prevent blood from flowing back into the ventricles.

This normal process is not working properly if you have heart disease. And over time, heart disease can progress to heart failure. In heart failure, your heart's chambers can't contract and relax properly because the heart muscle is weak.

This weakness reduces the ability of the heart to pump enough oxygen-rich blood to your body. If your heart failure is not responsive to treatment, it can become congestive heart failure. Congestive heart failure is more critical because fluid builds up in the lungs, causing shortness of breath and other symptoms.

Some medical treatments or therapies may help treat the symptoms of heart failure; however, such symptoms may gradually worsen, despite treatment, and become end-stage. At this stage, a heart transplant might be introduced as an option for treatment.





Embrace this incredible journey.

As a chosen hospital partner of the American Heart Association in Central Florida and the first and only hospital in Central Florida to offer heart transplantation, we have a long-standing history of helping patients just like you through this journey. We encourage all our patients to embrace the heart transplant process; it can be an amazing gift of life.

To feel empowered, learn what the heart transplantation process involves and how you can take ownership to make your journey the most positive and successful experience possible. Ask questions. Take an active role in the partnership for your health. And know that, through this journey, we are here to help.





We'll guide you through the heart transplant process.

Before the transplant

The pre-transplant process involves several steps:

- Referral and evaluation
- Case review
- Acceptance, listing and waiting period

Referral and evaluation

If you have heart disease that is not responding to treatment and your doctor thinks that you could be a good candidate for a heart transplant, he or she may refer you to the AdventHealth Transplant Institute for a formal evaluation. The transplant team will then guide you through the evaluation process to determine if you are eligible, or whether other therapies are available to you.

GOALS:

- Determine if a heart transplant is your best option for treatment
- Establish your baseline medical condition
- Find any health conditions that need treatment before transplant surgery
- Educate you and your family about the heart transplant process
- Determine your readiness for and commitment to the procedure
- Determine if you would not benefit from heart transplantation or if its risks would be too great

The evaluation process involves many tests and assessments to determine if you meet the criteria for a heart transplant. It requires assessing your physical health, your psychological readiness, and other factors that would influence the success of the transplant.

The evaluation may be done on an outpatient or inpatient basis depending on your health status and the tests that are required. The AdventHealth Transplant Institute will help you make accommodations for both, as the complete evaluation may take more than one day.

TESTS:

- Abdominal ultrasound/abdominal CT
- Blood tests
- Chest X-ray/chest CT
- Dental consultation
- Echocardiogram
- Electrocardiogram
- Metabolic stress test
- Ophthalmology consultation
- Psychosocial evaluations
- Pulmonary function tests
- Right heart catheterization

Case review

Once your evaluation is complete and all your test results are available, the entire transplant team meets to formally review your case and decide about your candidacy for transplantation. Ultimately, your evaluation results must show that you meet the following important criteria:

- No other significant diseases that would decrease chances of long-term survival
- No evidence of active cancer within the past five years
- Substance-free of alcohol, drugs and tobacco for at least six months, and must remain abstinent through all phases of transplantation
- No evidence of extensive vascular disease
- Commitment to actively participate in the transplant process and follow treatment plans
- Have an active social support system
- Have financial coverage for medications required to prevent organ rejection and follow-up care



Acceptance, listing, and waiting period

A transplant coordinator will notify you and your doctor of the transplant team's decision on candidacy. If you are not a candidate for transplantation, the transplant team will discuss other therapy options for you. If you are accepted as a candidate, final authorization will be requested from your insurance.

Once authorization is received, you will be notified and placed on the national organ donor computerized waiting list based on a specific listing status. The donor list is managed by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), a non-profit organization operated under the federal government whose mission is to distribute organs in an equitable, fair manner.

The UNOS system matches donor organs and recipients based on criteria that includes blood type, organ and body size, medical priority and length of time on the waiting list. Because of these criteria, there is no way to predict exactly how long your waiting period will last. It could take several weeks to a year or more.

Since many patients are not in the hospital during their waiting period, the transplant team must be able to reach you 24 hours a day via a cell phone or some other means. While on the waiting list, you will need to see your transplant physician for appointments at a minimum of every four to six weeks for monitoring and do your best to stay as healthy and strong as possible.

If a suitable donor is found for you and accepted, you will be contacted as soon as possible and given very specific instructions on what to do to prepare for the transplant. Generally, you will need to go to the hospital immediately.

During the transplant

After you arrive at the hospital, a transplant team member will review your medical history, do a complete physical exam and run some additional tests. Anesthesiologists and surgeons will also visit you for your written permission (consent) for the transplant surgery. Other transplant team members will prepare you for the surgery and do their best to make you feel as comfortable as possible.

It is important to understand that plans may change at any point before the actual transplant. The donor and you will be evaluated carefully until the actual time of surgery to assess for any potential complications that might affect the transplant.

Once you are cleared for the transplant and taken to the operating room, you will have special IV lines and an oxygen mask. The anesthesiologist will give you medication through the IV to make you fall asleep. Once you are asleep, the transplant team will start the surgery.

First, the transplant surgeon makes an incision in your chest. He connects you to the heart-lung (bypass) machine that will take over the function of your heart and lungs during the surgery. When the donor heart arrives, the surgeon will remove your diseased heart and replace it with the healthy donor heart. The entire surgery takes about six to eight hours, but can vary if there are any delays with the donor or complications.

After the transplant

After your transplant surgery is complete, you will be taken to the intensive care unit (ICU) where your family can see you once you are settled. As you improve, you will be transferred from the ICU to a private room on the thoracic surgery floor. The length of your hospital stay is hard to predict because it varies for each person, but the average length of stay after a heart transplant is seven to ten days.

While recovering, you will see many different members of the transplant team who will help you become more independent in your care. As you heal and gain strength, you will learn about how to take your medications and do other routines that will be critical for your life-long health.

Before you leave the hospital, you will be given a follow-up care schedule that will tell you when you need to have required clinic visits, lab work, X-rays, home care, and biopsies. To start, you will stay in close contact with the transplant team for weekly clinic visits.





Living your best life.

Having a heart transplant is a life-saving and life changing procedure. You and your family must make many adjustments to life as you knew it before, including different routines that involve:

- Daily monitoring of weight, temperature, pulse, blood pressure, blood sugar, etc.
- Following instructions to prevent infections
- Attending follow-up appointments
- Adhering to strict nutrition guidelines (low-salt and low-fat)
- Getting regular exercise
- Participating in cardiac rehabilitation
- Receiving life-long immunosuppressive therapy and medications

As you adjust, the transplant team is always available to discuss any issues with which you and your family need help. It is important to be gentle with yourself and your loved ones as you all work together throughout your recovery and settle into your new life as a transplant recipient. Your transplant journey is a lifelong gift of hope, and we are here to guide you through it every step of the way.

We're designed to help patients like you.

The AdventHealth Transplant Institute heart transplant team utilizes revolutionary technology to provide the most advanced procedures available — saving lives and providing new hope to you and your family. In fact, the AdventHealth Transplant Institute — working together with the world-renowned AdventHealth Cardiovascular Institute — performed Central Florida's very first heart transplant in February 2012.

Today, the AdventHealth Transplant Institute continues to serve our community with a state-of-the-art comprehensive heart transplant program. The Institute's highly skilled heart transplant team includes a group of surgeons, cardiologists, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, dietitians and other personnel who are experts in the field of heart failure and heart transplantation. This team is dedicated to a coordinated and multidisciplinary approach that helps patients achieve the best possible transplant outcomes.

Founded in 1973, the AdventHealth Transplant Institute is now one of the busiest transplant centers in the United States, having performed

more than 4,600 total transplants with survival rates among the highest in the country. In addition to heart transplants, we offer a wide range of multi-organ transplant options including kidney, liver, bone marrow and pancreas transplants. We are also home to a comprehensive living donor program.

Take charge of your cardiovascular care.

For more information or for a physician referral, call our cardiac care coordinator at (877) 659-9433.

This guide is provided to the general public to disseminate health-related information. The information is not intended to be used for diagnosing or prescribing. Please consult your physician before undertaking any form of medical treatment and/or adopting any exercise program or dietary guidelines.

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ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al número siguiente.



AdventHealth Cardiovascular Institute
Heart Transplant Program
Call 877-659-9433 for more information.