

Lung transplantation patient journey: from referral to long-term recovery



Referral and evaluation

Patients with some forms of advanced lung disease may be referred to a transplant centre for assessment of medical, psychological and social suitability. The team evaluates eligibility (including long-term commitment), benefits and risks.

Needs:

- Clear, timely referral pathways
- Multidisciplinary assessment



Waiting list

Once approved, patients join the waiting list. They remain under the treatment of their original medical team and begin contact with their transplant team. The patient needs to be ready every minute of the day to travel when a donor lung becomes available. In very serious cases, a patient may need a machine called extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), which temporarily takes over the work of the lungs to keep the patient alive while they wait for a lung transplant.

Needs:

- Standardised, timely assessments for fair access
- Clear information and support to stay healthy



Surgery

When a donor lung (and other organs that may be required) becomes available, patients undergo transplant surgery with post-operative ICU monitoring. After surgery, care includes anti-rejection medicines, pain management, and early mobilisation.

Needs:

- Coordinated surgery with experienced teams
- Clear guidance for patients and families



Recovery and rehabilitation (post-transplant care)

Recovery is lifelong, focusing on lung protection, strength and quality of life. Early rehabilitation starts in the transplantation centre and continues in the hospital and then the community. Patients manage medications, prevent infections, attend regular follow-ups and receive physical, psychological and social support. Rehabilitation includes physiotherapy, breathing exercises, self-monitoring at home and gradual return to daily life.

Ongoing care also includes monitoring for complications such as rejection, development of other conditions, or chronic lung problems, managing medications and side effects, staying up to date with vaccinations and adopting healthy lifestyle practices like nutrition, exercise and avoiding respiratory risks. Patients benefit from psychological and social support, self-monitoring for early warning signs, education on infection prevention and guidance for returning to work, travel and daily activities.

Needs:

- Structured, long-term rehabilitation programmes
- Regular specialist monitoring and rapid access to care
- Education on medications, infection prevention and self-management
- Psychological and social support for patients and families
- Support for return to work, independence and daily life



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