

Massachusetts General Hospital BMT Survivorship Program

General Self-Care

What is self-care?

Self-care includes any planned actions you take to care for your physical, mental and emotional health. Keeping up with self-care can be hard for anyone, especially people who have had a bone marrow transplant.

Self-care after transplant can mean different things to different people. Your views on health and wellness before your transplant can influence your views after transplant. Self-care can vary depending on transplant related complications, infections and whether or not you have graft versus host disease.

Nutrition – getting enough calories, protein and fluids can be difficult to maintain for many reasons. These reasons can include dry mouth, altered taste, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Here are some quick tips to help you with these issues:

Dry mouth:

- add sauces, gravies, broth and dressings to foods
- suck on ice chips, popsicles, gum or sugarless candies
- drink plenty of fluids with meals
- practice good mouth care
- do not drink alcohol or smoke

Altered taste:

- eat foods and beverages cold or at room temperature
- eat strongly flavored foods
- drink fluids with your meal to rinse away the bad taste
- eat protein without strong odors
- use plastic utensils

Nausea/vomiting:

- eat small, frequent meals
- take anti-nausea medicine 30 minutes before meal time
- eat dry crackers or toast before movement/getting out of bed
- eat low fat foods
- sip liquids slowly through a straw
- keep foods only in the kitchen

Diarrhea:

- eat smaller portions
- increase fluids to prevent dehydration
- drink fluids between meals
- eat foods high in potassium, like bananas or potatoes
- stay away from:
 - foods and drinks that have caffeine
 - dairy products

If you would like to meet with a Cancer Center dietician, please call 617-724-4000.

Self-care: Physical aspects

Some patients describe the physical aspects of post-transplant self-care as their “job.” This job often involves practical adaptations to physical changes.

Exercise – think creatively about ways to increase your activity level. Talk to your care team about activities that may be right for you. You should always start slow and increase your level of activity over time.

- Physical therapy is often helpful regardless of where you are after your transplant. Physical therapists are trained medical providers who can help with strengthening, flexibility, balance, edema and massage. (Stronach, 2010).
- Move even if it's climbing a few flights of stairs or walking around your yard. A little exercise each day will increase your stamina and overall strength.

Rest – Rest is important to your recovery. Try to establish a regular sleep schedule and stick to it! If you are not getting enough sleep, everything else will be more difficult. It is important to listen to your body. If you are tired, stop and rest. Do not overdo it, but don't be a couch potato either.

Mass General Resources

Physical Therapy

Available as one-time consult or recurring visit

617-726-2961

Lifestyle Medicine Clinic for Cancer Patients

Individualized exercise and lifestyle interventions to improve quality of life

617-724-4000