

More patients who have a transplant from an unrelated donor survive than in the past

What were researchers trying to learn?

Researchers wanted to learn how well patients do when they have a blood or marrow transplant from unrelated donors. They also wanted to learn whether transplants from unrelated donors have gotten better over time. Having this information helps transplant doctors and patients compare treatment options.

When a patient needs a transplant using a donor's healthy cells, those cells can come from either a related donor or an unrelated donor. A transplant doctor's first choice is usually a related donor (most often a brother or sister). But, about 70% of patients (7 out of 10) don't have a close match in their family. If a patient needs an unrelated donor, a transplant doctor will search for one on registries such as the Be The Match Registry[®].

Researchers studied more than 15,000 patients who had a transplant from an unrelated donor between 2000 and 2009.

What did they find?

Researchers measured overall survival, which tells you the number of patients alive at a specific time after transplant. In this study, the number of patients alive 3 years after transplant was about 10% better for transplants done between 2005 and 2009 compared to transplants done between 2000 and 2004.

The researchers looked at 4 different groups of patients, and found that each group had an **increase** in 3-year overall survival:

- Patients under 18 years old with cancer: survival went from 45% to 55% (10% increase)
- Patients 18-59 years old with cancer: survival went from 35% to 42% (7% increase)
- Patients 60 years and older with cancer: survival went from 25% to 35% (10% increase)
- Patients of any age with diseases that aren't cancer: survival went from 60% to 69% (9% increase)

The researchers pointed out several reasons for the increase in survival. A very important reason, they said, was that many more patients from 2005-2009 got their transplants sooner, before their disease had become worse. They also noted that the tests that match donors and patients have become more accurate.

Important Point:

3-year survival after transplant from an unrelated donor has increased over time.

Why is this important?

Transplant doctors can now give up-to-date information on 3-year survival to their patients who are considering transplant from an unrelated donor. This can help patients decide whether to get a transplant or choose a different treatment.

What else should I keep in mind about this study?

The results of research studies are always limited in what they can and can't tell you. With this study, one drawback is that the people were very different. They had different diseases and different treatments before and after transplant. This can make it hard to know what the results mean for you.

Questions to ask your doctor

If you are considering transplant from an unrelated donor, you may want to ask:

- What is the average survival for patients my age and with my disease?
- Is there anything about my health that would raise or lower my chances of survival?
- When is the best time for me to have a transplant?

Learn more about

- [This research study](#)
- [Blood and marrow transplant](#)

Source:

Majhail NS, Chitphakdithai P, Logan B, et al. Significant improvement in survival after unrelated donor hematopoietic cell transplantation in the recent era. *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation*. 2015 Jan 1; 21(1):142-150. Epub 2014 Oct 15. PMC4272902.

About this research summary

Ground-breaking research into blood and marrow transplant is happening every day. That research is having a significant impact on the survival and quality of life of thousands of transplant patients. But the research is written by scientists for scientists. By providing research news in an easy-to-understand way, patients, caregivers, and families have access to useful information that can help them make treatment decisions.

This information is provided on behalf of the Consumer Advocacy Committee of the CIBMTR® (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research®). The CIBMTR is a research collaboration between the National Marrow Donor Program®/Be The Match® and the Medical College of Wisconsin.