MSK Kids

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Keeping Your Child Active During Stem Cell Transplant

This information will help you understand why physical activity is important during your child's stem cell transplant. It also explains how your child's healthcare team can help.

Activity and movement are important to help your child grow and develop. Being in the hospital and staying in one room can reduce your child's mobility (ability to move) and level of activity. This can lower your child's strength and play skills. It may also delay their development.

About your child's rehabilitation team

MSK's Rehabilitation (Rehab) team is here to make sure your child stays active and engaged while they're in the hospital. The Rehab services at MSK will help your child keep their strength and improve their ability to do everyday activities. The Rehab team is made up of physical therapists (PT) and occupational therapists (OT). They will recommend and help with activities that let your child to stay physically and mentally active. They will also help your child take part in their daily routines throughout their hospital stay.

The importance of physical activity during your child's transplant

Physical activity is important for children of all ages. Physical activity helps infants and young children learn new skills. They do this by exploring their surroundings and by playing with their family and toys. Preschool children learn how to interact with other children. School-aged children improve their balance and coordination by being active every day.

Exercise, play, and movement help to:

- Keep your muscles strong.
- Keep your body flexible.
- Maintain your heart and lung health.
- Reduce stress and make you feel better.
- Improve your sleep.

It's important for your child to keep learning these skills. The goals of the Rehab team during your child's hospital stay are to:

- Promote normal development.
- Maintain healthy levels of activity.
- Encourage movement and normal daily activities.
- Maintain strength during transplant.
- Encourage normal sleeping.

The role of your child's physical therapist

PTs work to improve and maintain your child's movement and ability to exercise. Your child's PT will work with them to address any problems they may have with:

- Getting in and out of bed
- Walking
- Climbing stairs
- Balance
- Coordination
- Breathing

They will work with your child to help them slowly be able to do more advanced exercises, such as:

- Running
- Jumping
- Skipping
- Hopping
- Playing sports

It's important to encourage your child to do activities out of their bed. This helps them get stronger and more physically active.

The role of your child's occupational therapist

OTs work to improve your child's ability to do self-care tasks, engage in play activities, and use their cognitive (thinking) skills. Your child's OT will work to help them with any problems they may have with:

- Getting dressed
- Bathing
- Eating
- Using the bathroom
- Grooming (such as brushing their teeth and combing their hair)
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Coping with anxiety (strong feelings of worry), distress, and any other emotional issues
- Playing
- Hobbies (such as building, drawing, crafts, puzzles)
- School activities (such as handwriting)
- Memory and problem-solving tasks
- Using electronics and social media

They will also work with your child to make a daily program to meet their activity needs. This will help them gain independence in self-care and play.

How to improve your child's physical activity during their transplant

- Keep your child's routine in the hospital as close as possible to their routine at home.
- Make sure your child does all self-care tasks, such as grooming and washing up, in the bathroom. These activities shouldn't be done in bed.
- Encourage your child to get out of bed and get dressed every day. Help them play games and do activities like they do at home. If possible, your child should only spend time in bed while they're sleeping.
- Keep the lights on and shades up during the day. Reduce noise at night by turning off TVs.
- Be creative. Encourage your child to explore the area through play. For small children, use a mat on the floor to let your child move freely and learn new skills.
- Be part of your child's care while they're in the hospital. Learn your child's exercise program and offer support by doing the exercises together.

Changes in your child's treatment

Let your child's PT and OT know about any changes in their behavior or treatment. Your child's therapy will be changed, if needed. Tell your child's PT and OT if you notice a change in:

- How much your child takes part in their daily activities.
- Your child's ability to get in and out of bed, walk, or move.
- Your child's interest in playing.

What your child should avoid

It's generally safe for your child to get out of bed and be active at any time. But, when their blood counts are low, your child's physical activities may need to change. For example, your child may bruise more easily if they have a low

platelet count (less than 10,000). They may feel very tired with a reduced hemoglobin level (less than 7). Your child's healthcare team will tell you about your child's blood counts and what activities they can safely do.

We don't expect your child to be as active if they're very sick. We will adapt their activities and therapy program. We will also encourage them to take part in as much as they can. When your child feels better, we will increase their therapy and play activities.

Contact information

My child's physical therapist (PT) is: _____

My child's occupational therapist (OT) is: _____

If you have any questions, you or your healthcare provider can contact Rehab services. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 212-639-5384. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 6 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

Please use this space to write down any questions or concerns you have.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Keeping Your Child Active During Stem Cell Transplant - Last updated on April 30, 2026
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center