

Doctors say transplants treat systemic sclerosis or scleroderma

Most people with the extensive type of systemic sclerosis (also known as scleroderma) should be evaluated by a transplant physician for an autologous blood stem cell transplant, experts now say.

Scleroderma is an autoimmune disease. A person's own immune system mistakenly attacks healthy skin and joints. Scleroderma thickens the skin, limits the range of motion of joints, and causes pain. When scleroderma affects mostly the skin, it can be treated with medicines, not transplants.

A more severe type of scleroderma, called extensive scleroderma, attacks not only skin but also the lungs and other internal organs. People with extensive scleroderma may have difficulty breathing and digesting food. Extensive scleroderma often leads to death because it is hard to treat with medicines alone.

But now experts say transplants can be used to control extensive systemic sclerosis better than medicines alone. Autologous (auto) hematopoietic cell transplant (HCT) uses a person's own blood-forming cells. First, a person gets medicines that block the immune system and the autoimmune attacks of scleroderma. Next, the transplant helps restore the person's immune system.

The American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (ASBMT) is a nonprofit group of more than 2,200 transplant experts. It includes doctors, nurses, pharmacists, scientists and others in the field.

The ASBMT asked a group of transplant and scleroderma experts to look at scientific studies. They found that not only did HCT help people with systemic sclerosis live longer, but HCT also improved their skin, lungs and quality of life. HCT worked better than medicines alone.

In 2018, ASBMT wrote that auto HCT should be standard treatment for most people with severe systemic sclerosis. The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) gave the same advice in 2016.

Keep in mind

Some people are too sick to get auto HCT. Auto HCT can have serious effects, and the recovery is long. It's important to get evaluated by a transplant physician about whether auto HCT is the right approach.

Ask your doctor

What is the best treatment for me? What are the risks and benefits of the treatments that I am eligible to receive?

Learn more about

- [This research, from its publication](#)
- [Autologous transplant, from Be The Match](#)
- [Systemic sclerosis, from the Merck Manual](#)

Source

Sullivan KM, Majhail NS, Bredeson C, et al. Systemic sclerosis as an indication for autologous hematopoietic cell transplantation: position statement from the American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation. *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation: Journal of the American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation*. 2018 Oct; 24(10): 1961–1964. doi:10.1016/j.bbmt.2018.06.025. Epub 2018 Jun 25. PMC6239926

About this research summary

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.