

Recipient Story

My Journey Through and After My Transplant

Raghavendra Nagaraj, Liver Transplant Recipient, Chennai, India

Sujatha Suriyamoorthi, MOHAN Foundation, Chennai, India



Mr. Raghavendra Nagaraj

Background to my transplant

I was diagnosed with Liver Cirrhosis in March 2010 and informed by the doctors that I would need a liver transplant in about 3 years' time. Things were going fine until June 2014, when I developed appendicitis and was suggested to go for surgery. The surgery got complicated and the liver took a beating. At this point in time, my gastroenterologist recommended me to consult Professor Mohamed Rela.

This was when I first met Professor Mohamed Rela in July 2014. He opined that my liver was still good and if managed well, I could postpone my transplant for the next few years. I was treated by Dr. Rela's colleagues at the Global Hospitals, Chennai. Here again, things were going fine until Feb 2017 when I got infected and developed swelling in my feet. By then Dr. Rela suggested that this might be the right time to get the transplant done as I was fit to undergo the procedures and the post-transplant recovery would be quick and I could get back to normal activities in three months' time.

Since there was no donor in my family, I had to register myself with the Government of Tamil Nadu and waited for almost 10 months. Those 10 months were the most difficult time in my life. I developed many complications during my waiting period. I was frequently admitted to the hospital for the removal of fluids. I was completely malnourished and lost almost 30kgs of weight in about eight months' time. On 10th October 2017, I was admitted to the hospital with very low blood pressure and swollen abdomen. The next day afternoon, Dr. Dinesh Jothimani, Hepatologist and Liver Transplant Physician told me that he would discharge me as nothing more could be done at that point in time. He said, "I am going to miss you if you do not receive a transplant in a few days' time".

All the stars were aligned for something good to happen on the same day. At 2'O clock in the afternoon the Transplant

Coordinator, Mr. Sivakumar visited me and told me that there was an organ available and I should get prepared for my transplant. All the tests were performed and the surgeon explained the transplant procedure once again, the risks and complications involved in the surgery, and the pros/cons. It was 12th October 2017, the day I received my transplant and after a 12-hour surgical procedure, I was moved to the ICU. After 16 days, I cleared all the checkboxes and was ready for discharge. I would say 'It was a new lease of life'.

Staying healthy and fit after transplant and participating in the World Transplant Games

Starting from the time I was diagnosed with Liver Cirrhosis till my successful transplant, I realised that there was a complete ecosystem, involving hospitals, nurses, doctors, family, friends, relatives and employers, who work with us to get us back on track hale and healthy.

I have to say that the above ecosystem will collapse without the ultimate sacrifice of the donor family who comes forward to donate the organs of their loved ones.

After having undergone a Deceased Donor Liver transplant, I wanted to be very responsible and ensure that the hard work of so many people should not get wasted. I decided to work towards keeping myself fit and healthy.

Post my transplant, I was regularly visiting the clinic for check-up. Three months after transplant, my scars from the surgery reduced significantly and I had no pain whatsoever. I was doing simple walking exercise in my house for about 5km daily. I even returned to my work five month after my surgery and continued to do walking and simple stretches regularly.

During one of my regular clinic visits in May 2018, I was sharing with Dr. Dinesh about my routine fitness practices. Immediately Dr. Dinesh told that I should train well and participate in the World transplant games (WTG). He shared the website details and asked me to go through the information and contact the right people. I got very excited and spent a lot of time understanding the games by going through their website. I decided to participate in the 2019 WTG held in New Castle, UK.

I trained myself very hard for more than a year. I built a home Gym with good equipment and trained under the supervision of a good trainer. By the latter half of 2018, I was running half Marathon to build a good muscle strength. This gave me a huge confidence to participate in the WTG 2019.



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Workout at home

Participating in the WTG was a wonderful experience which had 2000 transplant recipients across the world. It gave me an opportunity to interact with people who have undergone various organ transplants such as liver, kidney, heart, bone marrow transplant, etc. It was highly encouraging to meet people who

were leading a healthy life after 20 years of transplant. From India, a team of 17 members participated in the games and won many medals on different categories. It was a very confidence building experience for someone like me who was staring at death a year back!

In fact, I am preparing myself for the next World Transplant Games to be held in Perth, Australia in 2023.

Addressing physical and psychological well-being during COVID-19

COVID-19 was one of toughest times for all of us, especially for the transplant recipients. Since we are on immunosuppressive medications, we are easily susceptible for any infections. It was becoming more challenging for the doctors and hospitals to monitor transplant recipients. Also, doing transplants seemed not possible at least in the initial phase of the pandemic as the hospitals were overburdened with COVID patients.

Moreover, due to the lockdowns people could not go out for their regular exercises to keep them fit. This was again not helpful not only to the transplant recipients but also the ones who were waiting to undergo a transplant.

I was fortunate that I could construct my own home gym where I could exercise regularly and keep myself fit. Honestly, lockdown helped me improve on my fitness levels and keep COVID out of my way.

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My message to the transplant recipients out there

- Take your medicines regularly. DO NOT STOP IMMUNOSUPPRESSANTS. Many people after getting better, stop their medications on their own and end-up in rejection of transplanted organ.
- Visit your doctor / clinic as per the schedule. Do not miss your tests.
- Exercise regularly. Like walking, simple stretching, running, cycling, swimming and weight training. Understand your body and do this to the level that your body can handle. Do not overdo. Avoid contact sports like football, hockey and basketball.
- Transplant recipients can live a normal and long life if we really value the efforts made by so many people who have helped us to live by following those simple steps.

Personally, I must tell that I am having a very happy, healthy and satisfying life after transplant. In February 2022, my services got extended by 2 years after my retirement. Not only that, I also got promoted as the President (North) of my company. All these happened because the company felt that I was healthy and I could contribute more to the organization.

My transplant journey and my mental and physical well-being after transplant have embarked enormous confidence to explore new things in my life.



Mr. Raghavendra Nagaraj at World Transplant Games, New Castle, UK – 2019

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