

*In the news – International***New Trial Explores Safer Approach to Immunosuppression After Liver Transplantation**

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A clinical trial by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) and the University of Pittsburgh marks a significant step towards reducing lifelong immunosuppression after liver transplantation. Published in Nature Communications (April 2026), this study was the first to demonstrate the success of an immune-priming approach in living donor liver transplant recipients. Launched in 2017, the clinical trial included 13 patients who received an infusion of specialized immune cells known as regulatory dendritic cells (DC), one week before their transplantation. Derived from the donor's blood, these cells are intended not to suppress but rather to prime the immune system of the patient and encourage recognition of the donor liver.

The results were encouraging as eight patients were found to be eligible to discontinue anti-rejection medication. While four successfully stopped immunosuppressive drugs completely, three have remained medication-free for more than three years. As lifelong immunosuppression is associated with kidney damage, infections, diabetes, cancer risk, and other complications, this approach could significantly improve long-term outcomes.

More randomized studies are needed before this technique becomes standard. If successful, it could enable carefully selected liver transplant recipients to use fewer immunosuppressive drugs.

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