

# The British Lung Foundation



## Lung transplantation

### What is a lung transplant?

A lung transplant involves the replacement of one or both diseased lungs with the healthy lungs of a donor. People can receive a single lung, double lung or complete heart-lung transplant - it depends on the nature and extent of the underlying disease.

### Why are they done?

Lung transplants are offered to people in the final stages of lung disease such as cystic fibrosis, COPD and other less common conditions, including pulmonary hypertension.

Lung transplantation is sometimes the only treatment that can improve breathlessness, if:

- your medical treatment is no longer working and
- you have severe breathlessness and reduced quality of life.

### Benefits and risks

People with successful transplants can have a near normal lifestyle.

After lung transplants you must take special drugs called immunosuppressants to damp down the body's immune system and prevent rejection of the new organs. The drugs also have a down side as they reduce your ability to fight infections, as well as some other side-effects.

Rejection may still happen and more research is needed to find better ways of preventing lung rejection. If you get chronic rejection in transplanted lungs they will gradually become more damaged. At present 50 per cent of people with lung transplants are alive and well after five years.

### Who is suitable for a lung transplant?

Unfortunately, the supply of donor lungs is very limited. The number of people who would benefit far outweighs the number of lungs available for transplant. As a result, donor lungs are reserved for people who will benefit most. The majority of transplants are given to people under 60.

### Where are they carried out?

Lung transplants in the UK take place in six specialist centres - you can be referred to the nearest one. Around 120 lung transplants are performed in the UK every year.

## Future prospects

Research continues into the best use of immunosuppressive drugs. In the future, stem cell research and organ regeneration may overcome the shortfall in donor organs.

**Last medically reviewed: February 2008**

© British Lung Foundation, 73-75 Goswell Road, London EC1V 7ER  
Helpline 08458 50 50 20 [www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org) [enquiries@blf-uk.org](mailto:enquiries@blf-uk.org)  
Registered charity of England and Wales - no. 326730 Charity registered in Scotland - no. SC 038415