

# I can tell you why my child is having a liver transplant.

## What is the liver and what does it do?

A healthy liver is soft, smooth, and reddish brown. It is under the ribs, on the right side of the body below the lungs. A person cannot live without a working liver. The liver does hundreds of important things, including:

### Processes

- Helps digest food
- Makes quick energy when needed by the body
- Turns food into substances needed to support life
- Controls the movement of fat in the body
- Helps use and store vitamins
- When medicine comes through the intestines, the liver turns it into a form that can be used by the body.

### Builds

- Makes substances needed by the body, such as proteins, vitamins, and bile acids
- Makes proteins that help the blood to clot
- Makes substances that protects the body

### Stores

- Stores iron
- Stores food that is used for energy (**glycogen**)

### Controls

- Balances hormones in the body
- Controls the making and movement of cholesterol

## Filters

- Breaks down poisons and medicines
- Clears waste products from the blood, like bilirubin and ammonia

## Defends

- Makes immune factors that fight germs
- Removes bacteria from the blood

## What is liver failure?

There are many causes of liver disease in children. When a person's liver cannot do its job, then that person's health is in danger. The liver transplant team will talk to you about the cause of your child's liver failure.

### Signs of liver failure include:

- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Forgetfulness, confusion, or coma (encephalopathy)
- Irritability, sleep changes
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)
- Muscles waste away
- Itching
- Blood does not clot well
- Fluid in the belly (**ascites**)
- Infections
- Bleeding in the stomach

Sometimes the liver can get better. This is called **regeneration**. However, if the liver does not improve the only treatment is to replace the liver with a liver transplant.

#### Disclaimer

The information provided at this site is intended to be general information, and is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of examination, treatment, or consultation with a physician. Phoenix Children's Hospital urges you to contact your physician with any questions you may have about a medical condition.