GVHD (Graft-Versus-Host Disease): A Guide for Patients and Families After Transplant

Transplant

The immune system is the body's tool to fight infection and disease. It works by seeing harmful cells as “foreign” and attacking them.

When you receive a donor's stem cells (the “graft”), their job is to recreate the donor's immune system in your body (the “host”).

Graft versus host disease (GVHD) is the term used when this new immune system attacks your body. Your donor's cells see your body as “foreign” and attack it—causing damage. GVHD can be acute or chronic.

Acute GVHD usually occurs within the first 100 days after your transplant. Acute GVHD commonly affects:

- skin
- liver (if not transplanted)
- lungs
- bone marrow

Chronic GVHD can happen 100 days after transplant, but it can occur as early as 60 days post-transplant. Chronic GVHD can reoccur for several years after transplant.