



**World Transplant Games Federation**  
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## NEWS ALERT:

### Outcome: Autologous Bone Marrow - Eligibility to participate vote

Recently, the World Transplant Games Federation (WTGF) conducted a vote among its members on whether to allow **autologous bone marrow recipients** to participate in future World Transplant Games. The outcome was **65% in favour**, enabling this group to join future events.

In line with this decision, the eligibility wording will be changed to the following:

“Entry is open to all recipients of life-supporting allografts (heart, intestine, kidney, liver, lung, pancreas) from other individuals, and hematopoietic cell (bone marrow) transplants, which may require or have required the use of immunosuppressive drug therapies. Bone Marrow transplants include both allogenic (from other individuals or species) and autologous (from the same individual) transplants.”

We understand that this decision has sparked various reactions within our community, including concerns about fairness, inclusivity, and communication. The vote was democratic, with 65% voting in favour and 35% voting against. To address these concerns, we want to clarify the process that led to this decision and provide further context.

- 1. Governance and Membership Involvement:** During the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on July 15th, the WTGF Board addressed several key issues under discussion for several years. One of the topics was the inclusion of autologous bone marrow transplants in the Games.

At the AGM, it was announced that a comprehensive communication would be sent to all members. This communication was to outline the background of the issue, including inputs from medical experts, and discuss the broader implications of these changes. We informed our member organisations that they would be asked to vote on this matter, to ensure a democratic decision which represents the views of the transplant community.

- 2. Voting Outcome:** Following the AGM, WTGF member organisations were invited to vote on this matter. On **September 30th**, detailed documentation was sent to all member organizations, encouraging them to consult their communities and submit votes by **October 31st**. The final vote resulted in **65% in favour of including autologous bone marrow recipients in future Games** and **35% against**. This outcome reflects the collective democratic voice of our global membership. It is important to note that even within the WTGF Board of Trustees, there are differing opinions. The outcome needed to present the majority voice of the entire transplant community.

- 3. Medical Context:** The WTGF consulted with medical professionals to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by autologous bone marrow recipients. These patients undergo high-dose chemotherapy, endure years of illness, and face extended periods of isolation - circumstances that highlight their remarkable resilience. To prepare for a successful autograft, the patient's existing bone marrow must be completely destroyed, which is a high-risk and intimidating process. This procedure carries a substantial risk of serious infections and other complications, making it equally as grueling as many organ transplants. The chemotherapy not only eradicates their diseased bone marrow but also strips away their immune identity to make way for the “new” bone marrow. Including these patients aligns with the Games' mission to celebrate recovery, determination, and resilience across diverse transplant journeys. It underscores the extraordinary courage required to endure such a transformative and challenging medical process.

- 4. Fairness and Inclusivity:** We acknowledge the diversity of experiences within the transplant community, from solid organ and tissue transplants to bone marrow transplants. The Games are a



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platform to celebrate these varied journeys rather than compare them. Furthermore, research indicates that athletic performance is shaped by training, preparation, and effort rather than the type of transplant received.

- 5. WTGF core mission and values:** This decision aligns with the objectives of the WTGF to promote amateur sport by encouraging participation among recipients of organ, tissue, and cell transplants. It aims to improve health through studies focused on enhancing the well-being of these recipients and to educate the public about the benefits of organ, tissue, and cell transplants.
- 6. Commitment to Transparency:** This decision followed a clear process involving the AGM, communication, and voting. The WTGF is a Federation of member organisations, and as such answerable at organisational level. The WTGF does not, however, get involved with how our member organisations engage with their members.

We deeply value the passion and commitment of our community and acknowledge that this decision has sparked differing views. We remain committed to fostering unity, respect, and understanding as we continue to grow as a community. If you have any questions, concerns, or feedback, please contact WTGF at [wtgf@wtgf.org](mailto:wtgf@wtgf.org)

Together, we can ensure the Games reflect the resilience, strength, and shared mission of the transplant community.

In the meantime, please consult the list of FAQs for further clarification on shared misinformation. We ask that you always clarify mis-information with the WTGF before sharing incorrect facts on online platforms.

Yours in transplant sport  
WTGF Board of Trustees

Contact: [wtgf@wtgf.org](mailto:wtgf@wtgf.org)



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## FAQ's: Autologous Bone Marrow Eligibility

### Are Autologous Bone Marrow transplants considered a transplant?

Yes, **autologous bone marrow transplants (ABMT)** are considered a type of transplant. While they differ from allogeneic transplants, where cells come from a donor, they meet the medical definition of a transplant because they involve removing, preserving, and reinfusion of the patient's own cells to restore bone marrow function.

### Why are Autologous Bone Marrow transplants considered a Transplant?

#### 1. Removal and Reintegration of Tissue:

- Stem cells are extracted (harvested) from the bone marrow or peripheral blood.
- They are processed and stored, then reinfused into the patient after preparative therapy (e.g., high-dose chemotherapy).

#### 2. Purpose of the Procedure:

- The reinfused cells help regenerate the patient's bone marrow, which has been damaged or destroyed by the underlying condition or its treatment.
- This restoration of function mirrors the intent of other transplant procedures: replacing or restoring tissue functionality.

#### 3. Medical Classification:

- In the medical community, autologous transplants are categorized as a type of hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT), which is widely recognized as a form of transplantation.

### Is someone who has an autologous bone marrow transplant considered a transplant recipient?

Yes, someone who has had an autologous bone marrow transplant is considered a transplant recipient. While the procedure involves the patient's own cells rather than those from a donor (as in allogeneic transplants), it is still classified as a form of transplantation.

#### Key Points:

- **Autologous Transplant:** The patient's own stem cells are harvested, typically before high-dose chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and then reinfused to help restore bone marrow function.
- **Transplant Status:** The procedure is categorized as a transplant because it involves removing, processing, and reintroducing stem cells to treat or support recovery from conditions like cancer or other disorders.

This distinction is important in medical contexts, and many organizations, such as transplant support groups or federations, include autologous transplant recipients within their scope of care and recognition.

### Is an Autologous Bone Marrow recipient considered a "recipient" even though their cells came from themselves?

An autologous bone marrow transplant recipient is considered a recipient in the medical context, despite the cells coming from their own body. The procedure involves harvesting and reinfusing their stem cells after high-dose chemotherapy or radiation, which can damage bone marrow.

#### Reasons they are considered recipients include:

- **Medical Context:** The complex process of harvesting, processing, and reinfusing stem cells is similar to organ transplants, as it aims to regenerate the bone marrow and immune system.



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- **Life-Altering Procedure:** The rigorous treatment before the transplant is often debilitating, making the reinfusion of stem cells critical for recovery.
- **Purpose in the Games:** The World Transplant Games includes those who have undergone significant medical procedures, acknowledging the journey of autologous bone marrow recipients alongside other transplant recipients.
- **Community Perspective:** Despite self-donation, the procedure requires medical expertise, aligning these patients with the broader goals of the Games, which celebrate recovery and resilience.

### **Does this change mean that all stem cell recipients can participate?**

No. The inclusion is specific to autologous bone marrow transplant recipients whose procedures are classified as transplants. This does not extend to recipients of other stem cell treatments, such as regenerative therapies, which are not classified as transplants under medical definitions.

### **Does an autologous bone marrow recipient have a sporting advantage over an allogenic bone marrow recipient or solid organ recipients?**

In general, **autologous bone marrow transplant (ABMT) recipients** do not inherently have a **physical advantage** over **allogenic bone marrow transplant (alloBMT) recipients** or **solid organ recipients** when it comes to sports. However, there are some factors to consider that might influence their recovery and physical performance. These factors largely depend on the individual's medical condition, the underlying disease, and the post-transplant recovery process rather than the type of transplant itself. Both groups overcome immense physical and emotional hurdles, and their success in athletic competition depends more on training, determination, and opportunity than on their type of transplant.

### **Do all organ and bone marrow recipients require ongoing use of immunosuppressants?**

Not all organ and bone marrow transplant recipients need ongoing immunosuppressants. The necessity for immunosuppressive therapy varies based on the type of transplant, the source of the transplanted tissue, and the individual's specific medical circumstances.

Typically, solid organ transplant recipients require lifelong immunosuppressants. However, research into tolerance-inducing therapies aims to reduce or even eliminate this lifelong requirement. In some cases, organ transplant recipients may eventually taper off immunosuppressants if their immune system develops tolerance to the graft.

Autologous bone marrow recipients may require immunosuppressants for a short period of time. On the other hand, allogenic transplant recipients usually need immunosuppressants for a defined duration, although these may often be tapered off to the point where none are needed if their immune systems adjust appropriately.

### **If I have stem cell therapy in my knee, can I participate in the World Transplant Games?**

No, having **stem cell therapy in your knee** (or any other joint or tissue) would not qualify you to participate in the **World Transplant Games**, as such procedures are not classified as transplants. The World Transplant Games defines eligible participants as those who have received **life-saving or life-supporting allografts** (e.g., organ transplants) or **hematopoietic cell transplants** (e.g., bone marrow transplants, including autologous and allogenic). Stem cell therapies for conditions like joint repair or regenerative medicine purposes do not meet the criteria of "transplant" because they are not life-saving or life-supporting in



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nature. Stem cell therapies for orthopedic conditions are not considered a **hematopoietic cell transplant** (as with bone marrow transplants) or an **organ transplant**, which are the types of transplants recognized for World Transplant Games eligibility.

### **What is the World Transplant Games about?**

The **World Transplant Games** is about much more than winning medals. While it is a competitive sporting event, its purpose and spirit extend far beyond simply achieving victory in a competition. The **World Transplant Games** is about celebrating life, honoring donors, inspiring others, and building a supportive global community. While medals are part of the competitive spirit, the true reward lies in the stories of triumph, resilience, and gratitude that each participant brings to the Games. The event embodies the spirit of life after transplantation and the incredible gift of a second chance.

### **Will allowing autologous bone marrow recipients to participate reduce the message the of the "Gift of Life"?**

While the inclusion of Autologous Bone Marrow recipients represents a broader definition of transplantation, it does not reduce the "gift of life" message. Instead, it expands the message to celebrate the full spectrum of transplantation's impact, honors donors, and reinforces the universal themes of resilience, recovery, and gratitude. The Games will continue to champion organ and tissue donation as the foundation of its mission and continue to thank organ donors.

### **Why did the WTGF implement a voting system for this decision?**

A democratic vote was crucial in deciding the eligibility of autologous bone marrow transplant recipients to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and alignment with the values of the World Transplant Games. This legitimized the decision and fostered unity, and a sense of shared purpose among all stakeholders. By using a democratic process, the Games were reinforcing their commitment to representing and celebrating the diverse transplant community.

### **Why was the vote given to the member organisations and not the individuals?**

The vote for eligibility was given to the member organisations rather than individuals because of the governance structure. The WTGF operates as a federation of member organisations, each representing their respective countries. In our structure, member organisations act as representatives of their communities, consolidating and reflecting the collective views of individuals in their region or country.

### **Why would 65% of the WTGF membership vote to allow autologous Bone Marrow recipients to participate?**

Allowing autologous bone marrow transplant recipients to participate in the World Transplant Games reflects the Federation's commitment to inclusivity, fairness, and recognition of the transformative power of transplantation. These individuals have overcome significant medical and personal challenges, embodying the spirit of resilience and determination that the Games seek to celebrate. By embracing their participation, the Games can further their mission of inspiring others, raising awareness about transplantation, and fostering a global community of hope and healing.

### **Is the decision to include autologous bone marrow recipients in the Games driven by revenue?**

We are aware that concerns have been raised regarding the recent decision to include **autologous bone marrow recipients** in future World Transplant Games. Some have questioned whether financial considerations drove this decision. We want to assure our community that this decision was made in alignment with the **core mission of the WTGF**. This decision was not meant to boost participation numbers but to display the broader reality of transplantation. The outcome was derived from a democratic vote after



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many years of being asked by the community to consider inclusion. We are continually listening to the voices of our community and will continue to uphold the integrity of the Games as a celebration of recovery and resilience.

### **Will there be future changes to the eligibility rules?**

The WTGF is committed to ensuring that the Games remain inclusive, fair, and reflective of the diverse journeys within the transplant community. Eligibility criteria are periodically reviewed to ensure alignment with the WTGF's mission of celebrating recovery, resilience, and life-saving or life-changing medical interventions.

While the recent inclusion of autologous bone marrow recipients was based on extensive discussion, expert input, and a democratic vote, we recognize that eligibility criteria may continue to evolve as medical science advances and as the needs of our community grow. Any further changes will include continued transparent communication, consultation with stakeholders and democratic decision-making.