

What You Need To Know About Selma Blair's MS Therapy, Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation

It's meant to "reboot" the immune system.

By **Amber Brenza**

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Just last week, Selma Blair revealed she had been discharged from a recent bout of therapy for her multiple sclerosis—and now, she's opening up about what type of treatment she received, and how she's feeling from it.

In a new Instagram post Wednesday, Blair, 47, shared a photo of her legs in a bathtub, with a few bruises scattered on her shins. "Insomnia," she captioned the post. "I am like a walking baby. Afraid and want to cry. I want my mom. I do. I will take a bath. And cry. The beginning is hard. I have to Remember." Selma ended her post with the hashtag "#hsct"—which can give some clues as to what treatment she underwent for her MS.

According to the National MS Society (NMSS), HSCT stands for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation. Essentially, HSCT is a therapy option that attempts to "reboot" or "reset" a person's immune system to help stop the inflammation that contributes to MS. (In her previous post, Blair also used the hashtag "#newimmunesystem.")

As the NMSS explains it, HSCT works by taking hematopoietic stem cells (a.k.a. blood cell-producing stem cells), derived from a person's own (or "autologous") bone marrow or blood. After the stem cells are collected and stored, the patient undergoes treatment with chemotherapy drugs to "deplete much of [their] immune system." Once that's done, the stored hematopoietic stem cells are reintroduced to the body where they presumably help reconstitute the immune system.

Overall, per the NMSS, after HSCT, a person's immune system can rebuild itself in three to six months. (Blair also referenced this, when she said she'd be "immunocompromised for [the] next three months at least.")

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HSCT is a fairly new procedure—the first randomized controlled clinical trial of HSCT for treatment of relapsing MS was recently published in January 2019 in *JAMA Neurology*. The study, led by Richard K. Burt, MD, chief of immunology and autoimmune diseases at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, found that among a group of 110 patients with relapsing MS, significantly fewer people experienced MS progression when treated with HSCT, compared to those who used a different therapy.

Of course, this was only the first of what will likely be many studies to further determine the safety and efficacy of HSCT, but according to Dr. Burt in an interview with the NMSS, HSCT can "reverse disability and significantly improve quality of life" when other therapies don't work.

That said, HSCT still comes with its share of risks. Dr. Burt told the NMSS that there is a risk of death from the therapy, though that would be most likely from an infection (Dr. Burt said no one died in his study, and that only one person developed an infection). Other risks include potential infertility and a small risk of HIV or hepatitis infection from blood transfusions during therapy, though he noted that too was also extremely rare.

While it's still too soon to see just how much of an impact HSCT has had on Blair's MS, history tells us one thing for sure: Blair will continue updating her fans and followers on her condition—and they're all definitely rooting for her.

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