



Blood transfusion

Patient information

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is when blood is given through an intravenous line (tube into your vein) because the medical team considers it the best option for you.

Consent

Consent is necessary before you can receive a transfusion of blood or blood products. The doctor must:

- Explain why the transfusion may be required
- Provide information about the blood product
- Explain the benefits and risks
- Ask for your permission
- Obtain written consent
- Discuss alternatives if available
- Answer any questions that you ask

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood

The Australian Red Cross Lifeblood collects blood for transfusion in Australia from unpaid volunteer donors. There are many procedures in place to ensure that the blood for transfusion is safely collected and screened for infections, including

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Syphilis
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- T-cell lymphocytic virus (HTLV)

Despite screening, the risk of infection is extremely low, at less than one in one million (1:1,000,000).

What are the alternatives to blood transfusions?

In some circumstances there may be alternatives to a blood transfusion and it is important that you and your doctor discuss and consider these options. Alternatives may include:

- Treatment with oral iron supplements if you are iron deficient
- Treatment with an intravenous iron infusion if you have failed a trial of oral iron supplements and you are iron deficient
- During surgery, we may be able to collect your lost blood and return it to you (cell salvage)
- Specialised procedures and medications that can minimise blood loss

Blood transfusion checklist

Do you understand why you need a blood transfusion?

Do you understand what product you require and what it will do?

Have the benefits and risk of transfusion been explained?

Have alternatives to transfusion been discussed?

Have you signed a written consent form?

Do you have any further questions?

What are blood components and blood products?

Donated whole blood consists of multiple components and each has a different purpose for transfusion.

Red cells

- Are given to replace blood lost during surgery, childbirth or due to a serious injury/trauma
- Are given to treat anaemia
- May be needed if your body can't produce enough red blood cells due to illness

Platelets

- May be required to stop or prevent bleeding if your platelet numbers are too low or aren't working properly

Plasma (fresh frozen plasma and cryoprecipitate)

- Contains important proteins including clotting factors that may be required during times of bleeding

Plasma-derived products

- The majority of plasma – derived products are manufactured from voluntary donors.
- They are mainly used to replace missing proteins from the clotting or immune system

They are mainly used to replace missing or dysfunctional elements of the clotting or immune systems

What are some of the risks of a transfusion?

Most blood transfusions are problem free. However, very rarely, situations occur that can cause serious harm or possibly death.

The decision to transfuse blood products is assessed on your symptoms, blood results, state of health, consent and any risks.

Rare risks are

- Severe allergic reaction
- Transfusion transmitted infections
- Receiving the wrong blood

Common reactions can include

- Fever (high temperature)
- Chills
- Rash/itching
- Urticaria (hives)
- Headache
- Nausea
- Difficulty breathing

You will be closely monitored during your transfusion and if you feel unwell at any time during the infusion please immediately advise your doctor or nurse.

A delayed reaction can occur up to two weeks following a transfusion and requires prompt medical advice. You might experience:

- Fever
- Dark-coloured urine
- Yellow-coloured skin or eyes
- Severe unexplained bruising

Did you know?

- That you have the right to withdraw your consent (permission) for transfusion at any time, but you must notify your doctor.
- Transfusions of blood components or products should only be given when the benefits outweigh the risks.
- The refusal of transfusion when recommended may result in increased risks to your health



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