

# A GENERAL GUIDE TO BLOOD TRANSFUSION

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS & FAMILIES

### Blood transfusion

A blood transfusion is a procedure where you receive blood through an intravenous cannula (IV) inserted into a vein.

You may need a blood transfusion if your body cannot make parts of your own blood, if your blood cells are not working properly, or if you have lost blood.

It is often possible to reduce or avoid the need for a transfusion.

- Discuss with your health care team the best way to treat anaemia (low number or quality of red blood cells).
- If you are having surgery, discuss with your health care team the need to stop or withhold certain medications, so your risk of bleeding is reduced.
- Your health care team may suggest having your blood collected and returned to you, during some types of major surgery.
- If you do need a transfusion, you should receive only what is needed to relieve your symptoms. For example, once you have received one bag of red blood cells, you should then be reviewed to see if another bag is needed. One bag may be enough.

### Parts of blood that may be needed

**Red cells** carry oxygen to body tissues and organs. They may be given if your levels are low, or you have lost blood.

**Platelets** help blood to clot and are given to prevent or stop bleeding.

**Plasma** contains factors that work with platelets to help blood to clot and may be given to prevent or stop bleeding.

**Other blood products** are given for a wide range of reasons, for example, to improve the immune system or to replace some clotting factors.

For more detailed information on blood transfusion, please visit [www.mytransfusion.com.au](http://www.mytransfusion.com.au)

### If you need a transfusion

You will need to have a blood test to establish your blood group and make sure your type is available.

When you are having your blood test, you should help to check that all the details on the form and the tube are correct and exactly match. This includes your full name spelt correctly and your date of birth.



#### Disclaimer

This fact sheet is for your educational purposes only. It should not be used to guide and/or determine actual treatment choices or decisions. Any such decisions should be made in conjunction with advice from your treating doctor or other health professionals.

## Risks

Australia has one of the safest blood supplies in the world, however, as with all medical procedures, a blood transfusion is not completely free from risk.

Most common risks of transfusion include:

- Minor reactions including a mild temperature, or skin rash
- Fluid overload, causing breathing difficulties, especially in older patients and those with heart disease.

Other less common risks of transfusion include:

- Receiving blood that is not 'matched' to you
- Severe reactions, for example, allergy or acute lung injury
- Transmission of infection, for example, bacteria or viruses.

## Consent

Treatment is your choice. Before you are given a transfusion, you should be asked to agree.

Use this quick checklist to help you make this choice.

- Do you know why a transfusion has been recommended?
- Have you asked about ways to avoid or reduce transfusion?
- Do you understand the risks?
- Have all your questions been answered?

## When you get a transfusion

Before a transfusion, strict checks of your name and date of birth are done again. Two staff members will do this with you. If you need to have more than one bag of blood, or type of blood product, staff will do these checks every time.

Staff will also carefully monitor you for any problems during the transfusion. This means measuring your pulse, blood pressure and temperature at regular

times. Most people feel no different during a blood transfusion, but if you feel unwell in any way, tell staff immediately.

You may have a blood transfusion and be able to leave the hospital straight away. Before you leave, speak to staff about what to do if you feel unwell later.

## Addressing concerns

If you are worried at any time, it is important that you speak up. Tell the staff of your concerns, because serious medical problems can occur if you are given the wrong blood. This includes:

- If there is any problem when checking your name and date of birth
- If you feel that the checking has not been done correctly
- If you feel unwell at any time during or after the transfusion.

## General information

If you need to have more than one transfusion, or you need to have regular transfusions, you will need to have a blood test every time.

If you have not had a test and you need blood very quickly, you can be given a special blood type, until blood matched for you is available.

Identification details must always be checked with another person, such as a support person, family member or another member of staff.

### About Blood Watch

Blood Watch is a program run by the Clinical Excellence Commission. It aims to improve clinical practice associated with transfusion medicine.

It promotes medical and surgical strategies to manage appropriately both donated blood resources and the patient's own blood, to improve individual patient outcomes.

For further information on the Blood Watch program, please visit <http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/programs/blood-watch>

A General Guide to Blood Transfusion: Information for Patients and Families, Released March 2014, © Clinical Excellence Commission 2014. SHPN (CEC) 140070