

# Will I need a blood transfusion?



***IMPORTANT PATIENT INFORMATION***

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## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL PATIENTS WHO MAY NEED A BLOOD TRANSFUSION

Like all medical treatments, a blood transfusion should only be given if it is essential. Your doctor will balance the risk of you having a blood transfusion against the risk of not having one. Ask your doctor, nurse or midwife to explain why you might need a blood transfusion.

### Why might I need a blood transfusion?

Most people can cope with losing a moderate amount of blood without needing a blood transfusion and this loss can easily be replaced with other fluids. Your body will make new red blood cells (essential for carrying oxygen throughout the body) over the following few weeks. However, if larger amounts of blood are lost, a blood transfusion may be the only way of replacing blood rapidly.

A blood transfusion may be needed to treat severe bleeding, for example during or after an operation, childbirth or in a major accident. A blood transfusion can also be used to treat severe anaemia (a lack of red blood cells).

### Is a blood transfusion my only option?

Blood transfusion is only needed for a small number of patients having an operation. Sometimes it is possible to recycle your own blood during or after an operation. Ask if this is appropriate for you.

Certain medical conditions causing anaemia may be managed by treating the cause rather than by giving a blood transfusion.

If you are told that you might need a blood transfusion, you should ask why it is necessary and whether there are any

alternative treatments. You do have the right to refuse a blood transfusion, but you need to fully understand the consequences of this before doing so.

Some medical treatments or operations cannot be safely carried out without a blood transfusion being given.

### **What can I do to reduce the need for a blood transfusion before an operation?**

If you do not eat enough foods containing iron, you may have low iron levels. A varied and balanced diet should normally provide an adequate iron intake. Your blood count should be checked 6-8 weeks before your operation to see if you are anaemic. A shortage of iron can cause anaemia and correcting this in good time, before your operation, may reduce the need for a blood transfusion.

Some medicines, such as warfarin, aspirin and some anti-inflammatory drugs may increase the risk of bleeding during your operation. Always check with your doctor to find out if you should stop taking these before your operation, and when you should restart them.

### **Are blood transfusions safe?**

The biggest risk from receiving a blood transfusion is being given the wrong blood.

You must be correctly identified to make sure that you get the right blood transfusion. Wearing an identification band with your correct details is essential. You will be asked to state your full name and date of birth, and the details on your identification band will be checked before each bag of blood is given.



If you have previously been given a card which states that you need to have blood of a specific type, please show it as soon as possible to your doctor, nurse or midwife and ask them to tell the hospital transfusion laboratory.



Compared to other everyday risks the likelihood of getting an infection from a blood transfusion is very low. All blood donors are unpaid volunteers. They are very carefully selected and tested to make sure that the blood they donate is as safe as possible.

The risk of getting hepatitis from a blood transfusion is currently about 1 in 500,000 for hepatitis B and 1 in 30 million for hepatitis C. The chance of getting HIV or HTLV infection is about 1 in 5 million. Although the risk of getting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) from a blood transfusion is probably low with a single blood transfusion, the risk of any infection will increase with additional blood transfusions. Each year, approximately 2 million units of blood are transfused in England and there have been just a handful of cases where patients are known to have become infected with vCJD from a blood transfusion.

### **How will my blood transfusion be given?**

A blood transfusion is usually given through a tiny tube directly into a vein in the arm. Each bag of blood can take up to four hours, but can be safely given more quickly if needed. You may be given more than one bag of blood during your transfusion.



### **How will I feel during my blood transfusion?**

Most people do not feel anything whilst receiving a blood transfusion.

You will be observed at regular intervals; if you begin to feel unwell during or shortly after your blood transfusion, you should inform a member of staff immediately.

Some people may develop a temperature, chills or a rash. These reactions are usually mild and are easily treated with paracetamol, or by slowing down the blood transfusion. Fortunately, severe reactions to blood are extremely rare. If they do occur, staff are trained to recognise and treat these.

### **What if I have worries about receiving a blood transfusion?**

If you have any concerns you should discuss these with your doctor, nurse or midwife. Most hospitals have specialist staff working in blood transfusion and, if appropriate, they may be able to come and talk to you.



## Other Information

If you are interested in finding out more about blood transfusion and have access to the Internet, you may find the following websites useful:

National Blood Service:  
**[www.blood.co.uk](http://www.blood.co.uk)**

National Patient Safety Agency:  
**[www.npsa.nhs.uk/pleaseask](http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/pleaseask)**

The National Blood Service (NBS) is part of NHS Blood and Transplant, a Special Health Authority within the NHS, and provides the blood that patients receive.

In order to plan for future blood demands, information about which patients receive blood needs to be gathered. We may ask a Trust or GP to provide limited medical information on a sample of patients who have received blood transfusions.

Any information that is passed on to the NBS is held securely, with the rights of these individuals protected under the Data Protection Act.

Additional copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the NBS Hospital Liaison Office.

**Call 01865 440042.**

Thank you to Valerie, Mark and Tony for allowing us to photograph them whilst receiving a blood transfusion.