



# Blood transfusion: Information for patients



## What is a transfusion?

When you receive blood, or blood components, it is called a transfusion. When blood is collected from a donor it can be split into, three parts (components): red cells, platelets and plasma. Each person only gets the part that they need. What you receive depends on your medical condition.

In Australia Blood is collected by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service from voluntary, unpaid donors. All donors are interviewed and assessed for suitability to donate blood. Every blood donation is tested for the presence of certain infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

## Common reasons for blood and blood product transfusions

Do not be afraid to ask why you need a transfusion. Your doctor can advise you why you need a transfusion and which type of blood product that you may need.

Some common reasons for blood and blood product transfusion are:

- An accident where there is significant blood loss
- An operation where there is significant blood loss
- An illness that affects how your blood cells work
- Cancer treatment that may affect the way your body makes blood cells
- Blood loss because of some other illness or condition

## 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. Ask your treating team for more information on risks.

Risks of transfusion include:

- Minor reactions including a mild temperature, or skin rash
- Fluid overload, causing breathing difficulties, especially in older patients
- Receiving blood that is not correctly 'matched' to you
- Severe reactions, for example, allergy or acute lung injury
- Transmission of infection, for example, bacteria or viruses

## Can I avoid a transfusion?

It may be possible to reduce or avoid the need for a transfusion. Please discuss your options with your health care team. 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.

## Consent

Any treatment, including blood or blood product transfusion is your choice and will not take place without your prior consent (except in emergency life saving situations where you or your approved advocate does not have the capacity to consent).

Like any form of medical treatment, you have a right to refuse or seek more information. Before you are given a transfusion, you should be asked to agree to have a transfusion.

When providing consent for blood, use the checklist to help you make an informed decision about your treatment.

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I am aware of which blood component/s will be transfused. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I am aware of the expected benefits of this transfusion.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I am aware of the potential risks and side effects.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I am aware of potential alternatives.                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | All of my questions have been answered.                   |

## Your Identification

**Correct identification is very important for safety reasons and you will be asked to confirm your identification several times during the transfusion process.**

Before you receive a transfusion, the transfusion laboratory requires a sample of your blood for testing to ensure they provide the most suitable available blood product for you. This is called cross matching.

The person taking your blood sample must verbally check your identification before and after taking the blood sample and will ask you to confirm your identification by asking you to state and spell your name and date of birth. They may also ask you your address or if you are in hospital and wearing an identification band the person taking your blood will also check to see that the information on the request form matches your identification band including your hospital medical record number. The staff member will then correctly label all samples. You will be then asked to confirm these details are correct. If you think your details are not correct, or you feel the checking has not been done correctly please tell the person collecting the blood sample.

All patients receiving blood components must wear an identification band. Before a transfusion commences two staff members will check your identification again by asking you your name and date of birth and checking these against your identification band ensuring the details match exactly. If you need to have more than one bag of blood, or type of blood product, staff will do these checks *every time*. If you are concerned at all during the identification check, it is important that you tell us.

## If you are concerned during or after the transfusion

Transfusions usually take between 2-4 hours. You will be closely monitored before, during and after your transfusion with staff members checking your temperature, heart rate, blood pressure and breathing. Although most people feel no different during a blood transfusion, if you feel unwell in any way, tell the staff of your concerns immediately.

This may include:

- difficulty breathing
- nausea/vomiting
- chest pain
- headache
- chills
- high temperature
- shaking
- pain at the needle site
- rash
- itching
- hives
- fast or irregular heartbeat
- restlessness
- dark or decreased amount of urine



## Standard 7: Blood and Blood Products

Reactions to blood components can occur during your transfusion or they may be delayed and occur once your transfusion has finished. The majority of reactions are not severe and can be corrected with minor medical intervention. The most avoidable risk with a transfusion is receiving the blood meant for someone else, this is why your identity is very important and you should let someone know if you have any issues with the identification process or details on your identification band.

If you have been discharged and then feel unwell such as feeling hot or feverish, a rash appears that was not there prior to the transfusion, any difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath you should contact or see your doctor or present to the nearest Emergency Department for assessment.

## More information

More information on particular components is available from the Blood Service MyTransfusion web site  
<http://mytransfusion.com.au/node/resources-0>  
Or

Ask your treating team to provide you with more information on:

WHAT'S IN A BAG: RED CELLS

WHAT'S IN A BAG: PLATELETS

WHAT'S IN A BAG: PLASMA

WHAT'S IN A BAG: CRYOPRECIPITATE

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