

Blood transfusions

Patient information

Why people need transfusions

Some common reasons for a transfusion are:

- large blood loss from surgery, major accidents or childbirth
- you are not able to make enough healthy blood cells due to illness
- lack of red blood cells (anaemia) that cannot be treated with iron therapy.

Your doctor will tell you the specific reason.

Types of blood products

A blood component/product is any part of the blood that is transfused or given to a patient.



Red blood cells deliver oxygen to your tissues and organs.



Platelets are given to prevent or stop bleeding. This product is yellow in colour.



Fresh frozen plasma and cryoprecipitate contain clotting factors that work with platelets to seal wounds. These products are also yellow in colour.

Plasma is also used to make products such as albumin (filling fluid), Intragam 10 (for patients with poor immunity) and other products containing antibodies for vaccinations, or factors to help blood clot.

Blood safety

All fresh blood products transfused in Australia come from unpaid volunteer donors.

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service has one of the safest blood supplies in the world and has many safeguards to ensure the blood is safe.

All donations are tested before they can be given to patients. Any that fail testing are not used.

Despite testing, there is a very small risk of infection.

The estimated risks are:

Infectious disease	Risk
Hepatitis C	Less than 1 in 1 million
Hepatitis B	Less than 1 in 1 million
HIV/AIDS	Less than 1 in 1 million

Blood Service risk estimates 2018

Other risks

Other risks include:

- minor reactions such as chills or fever or a rash
- fluid excess that could cause breathing problems
- blood not being correctly matched to you. The risk of this more serious reaction is reduced by strict patient identification and checking actions, along with strict checking in the laboratory
- severe allergic reaction or lung injury, which rarely occur.

You will be watched very closely during the transfusion. If you are worried that you are experiencing a reaction, or you are not feeling well in any way during the transfusion, tell the nurse.

You should talk to your doctor about the risks as well as the benefits of having a transfusion.

Alternatives to blood transfusion

There are alternatives to transfusion, and these are used wherever possible. One example is treatment with iron to build up haemoglobin levels before an operation. This may prevent the need for a transfusion. If you would like to know more about alternative treatments and ways to prevent a transfusion that could work for you, please ask your doctor.

Refusing a blood transfusion

If you have any objection to having a blood transfusion for religious or other reasons, it is extremely important to discuss this with your doctor.

What happens during a transfusion

First, you must have a blood test. For a red blood cell transfusion, a 'cross match' is done to ensure the blood you are given is safe for you. This may take some time to do.

When your blood test is taken, you will be asked your name and date of birth. This will be checked against your wristband (if you are in hospital) and the test request form. You should be asked to check that the details on the blood test are correct. This is to prevent your blood from being confused with another patient's blood.

You will be asked to consent to the transfusion. It is important that you have talked to your doctor about the risks and benefits of the transfusion, and have had an opportunity to ask questions. Usually, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

The blood is given intravenously (through a needle into a vein), usually in your arm or hand. The process should be painless, apart from when the needle is put in.

Two staff members will ask you your name and date of birth before giving you the blood. They will check that these details match the information on your identification band, the blood bag and paperwork. If any details do not match exactly, the transfusion cannot go ahead.

This is a safety check to make sure you are given the right blood. Every bag of blood given to you will be checked this way.

During the transfusion, your temperature, heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure and general condition will be closely monitored.

How long transfusions take

The number of bags and type of blood components you receive will depend on your specific condition. As a guide:

- red cells usually take two to three hours per bag (unit)
- platelets usually take 30 to 60 minutes per bag
- fresh frozen plasma usually takes 30 to 60 minutes per bag.

Health Service:

Contact person:

Phone number:

Information checklist

1. Do you understand why you need the blood product transfusion?
2. Have the possible risks and benefits been explained to you for your particular circumstances?
3. Have the alternatives or other treatment options been explained to you?
4. Do you understand the information, and have all your questions been answered?

What else you should tell your doctor

You should tell your doctor if you:

- have a reason not to accept a blood transfusion
- had a reaction to any blood product in the past or require any special products
- are taking any medications – including blood-thinning or natural therapies.

For more information about blood transfusions, visit the [My Transfusion website](https://mytransfusion.com.au/) <<https://mytransfusion.com.au/>>, or talk to your treating doctor.

Contacts

If you go home the same day as your transfusion and you have any concerns, contact the health team at your hospital.

To receive this publication in an accessible format email [Blood Matters](mailto:bloodymatters@redcrossblood.org.au) <bloodymatters@redcrossblood.org.au>

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Consumer input provided by the Blood Matters Advisory Committee member health services consumer participants.