

RECEIVING A BLOOD TRANSFUSION

A blood transfusion is only given when you really need it. Your doctor will tell you why you need a blood transfusion. Don't be afraid to ask for any further information you need.

What does blood do?

Blood is the fluid that circulates throughout the body. It carries oxygen and nourishment to the tissues and takes away waste. It is made up of red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma. Red blood cells travel throughout the body delivering oxygen to tissues and removes carbon dioxide through the lungs. Plasma is a clear fluid that acts as a transport system for red cells, white cells and platelets. Plasma also helps in clotting. Platelets are small blood cells that aid in the clotting process.

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is where blood is taken from a healthy adult and given to another person. The transfusion can be of red cells, platelets or plasma. The type and number of products that you may be given depends on *your individual case*. A blood transfusion is given into your vein by a drip in your arm.

Why might patients need a blood transfusion?

Blood and blood components are used to correct abnormalities in the blood, which cannot be corrected by any other means.

Common reasons for blood transfusions are:

- Excessive blood loss, for example after delivery of your baby, or after surgery.
- Bleeding or clotting disorders
- Anaemia

If you lose a lot of blood during an operation or during the delivery of your baby, your doctor will want to replace your blood with a blood transfusion immediately so that you will not suffer immediate effects from your loss of blood. If you have anaemia, your body does not have enough red cells to carry the oxygen you need. You may feel tired or breathless and a blood transfusion is an effective treatment when a speedy recovery is needed.

Are transfusions safe?

The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) has put in place many safeguards to protect the safety of our national blood supply. In Ireland, all blood donors are voluntary and unpaid because such donors are the safest source of blood.

What are the symptoms of a reaction?

During the transfusion you will be carefully observed for any possible reactions. Sometimes you may experience mild symptoms such as fever and/or a rash, shortness of breath, back pain or a burning sensation along the vein that has the

'drip'. Please tell the midwife or nurse immediately if you feel unwell or feel you have any of the above symptoms. You may require treatment.

Transfusion after a reaction

If a patient has a reaction and needs another transfusion, giving medication prior to the transfusion or giving a different blood component may prevent further reaction. Some months after a transfusion, some patients may develop antibodies to minor blood groups in the donor's blood. These antibodies will not usually make the person ill, but will be important for future transfusions or pregnancy. They will be discovered when the blood is tested and this test will also help decide what sort of blood should be given the next time around.

Can my relatives or friends donate blood for me?

This is called "directed donation" and is not carried out in Ireland, the UK or in most European countries. Research has shown that such transfusions are not any safer than carefully selected voluntary donations.

Are there alternatives to having a blood transfusion?

Alternatives to blood transfusion are continually being developed. Improved surgical methods are used to decrease the amount of blood loss and reduce the need for blood during operations. Sometimes, other fluids can replace blood loss and your body will make new red cells over the next few weeks. Other alternatives may be offered, depending on your underlying illness and your general health.

Where can I get further information if I need it?

If you require further information, please ask the doctors, midwife or nurses on the ward or in the clinic.

The importance of blood donation

Giving blood can save someone's life. Adequate supplies of blood depend on the generosity of volunteer blood donors. Please encourage your friends and relatives to become blood donors. Further information about blood donation can be obtained from the Irish Blood Transfusion Service on 1850 73 11 37 or www.ibts.ie.

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