

Blood Transfusion

What is a blood transfusion and why do I need it?

A blood transfusion is when you get blood from someone else through a small tube in your arm. This can happen if you lose a lot of blood during surgery or an accident, or if your body doesn't make enough blood on its own.

What happens during a transfusion?

During a transfusion, you might get parts of blood like red blood cells, plasma, platelets, or cryoprecipitate [cry-oh-pee-SEH-peh-tate]. The blood goes into your body through a tube in your arm and it usually takes 1 to 3 hours to complete.

What can I expect after a transfusion?

When your transfusion is done, the needle and IV will be removed. You will be given instructions on how to care for yourself when you go home. The instructions will tell you what side effects or symptoms to watch for. Most reactions happen within the first 2 hours after an infusion. Some may happen up to 6 months after the transfusion.

Call your doctor at: _____ or the Emergency Department at: _____ if you have these symptoms within:

A few hours of transfusion	4 weeks of transfusion	6 months of transfusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hives or itching, or both • Chills or fever, or both • Nausea or vomiting, or both • Sudden diarrhea • Skin rash • Back or chest pain • Red or brown urine (pee) • Swelling or pain near the infusion site • Unusual shortness of breath or trouble breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased tiredness • Unusual shortness of breath • Red or brown urine • Yellowing of the eyes or skin (jaundice) • Fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased tiredness • Nausea or vomiting • Dark urine • Yellowing of the eyes or skin (jaundice)

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace life-threatening loss of blood from surgery or a serious accident • Replace important parts of blood that your body does not produce enough of on its own (as with certain medical conditions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood reactions, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Breakdown of red blood cells in your blood or the transfused blood, which happens very rarely and is called a hemolytic [HE-moh-lit-ik] reaction – Allergic reactions (which could be life threatening) – Fever reactions and chills – Sudden lung injury, causing breathing problems – Reactions from too much fluid in your body (volume overload) • Infection either from bacteria introduced through the IV or from bacteria or an undetected virus in the donor's blood • Problems with the IV, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blockage of the IV tubing – Bruising, swelling, or infection at the IV site – Inflammation and/or clotting of the vein at the IV site – Leakage of blood or blood substances into the tissues surrounding the vein – Blood vessel problems that may limit blood flow and hurt organs and tissues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A thrombus (blood clot) – An embolism (an air bubble) – A spasm in an artery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In many cases, there is no alternative to a blood transfusion. • In other cases, your doctor may be able to give you medicines to stimulate blood cell growth or reduce bleeding.

How does my armband keep me safe?

When you go to the hospital, they put an armband on you with your name and other important information. This is to keep you safe. The armband stays on your arm from the time they take a blood sample until you get your blood transfusion. The armband helps to make sure that the blood they give you matches your blood type and is safe for you.

If the armband is taken off before you get your blood transfusion, they have to put a new one on and take another blood sample to make sure the blood is still safe for you. This takes extra time and money. If you are only getting plasma products, which are different from red blood cells, you may get a new armband but may not need a new blood sample.

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