

Receiving a Blood Transfusion

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion involves blood being given through a tube into the bloodstream. Transfusion has been recommended because it is the best option for you at this point.

Do I need to give consent for a blood transfusion?

Yes, consent is necessary prior to being given a transfusion. Consider the following statements and if you have any doubts, please ask your clinical team.

- ✓ I understand why transfusion has been recommended and other possible options for treatment.
- ✓ I am aware of the expected benefits of a transfusion.
- ✓ I am aware of the potential risks and side effects.
- ✓ I am aware of which blood products will be transfused.
- ✓ I am aware of how the transfusion will be given and how long it will take.

In an emergency, there may not be time to discuss your transfusion and obtain your consent. However, the reasons for the transfusion will be explained to you as soon as possible.

Which blood product might I receive?

After blood is collected from a donor it is separated into parts so you only receive the part that you need.

Red blood cells

Red blood cells carry oxygen around the body. A low number of red blood cells results in anaemia. Some causes of anaemia include blood loss, increased red cell breakdown and reduced red cell production.

Platelets

Platelets help to stop bleeding by forming a clot. A low platelet count can be due to too few platelets being made, too many being used or too many being destroyed. Some causes include infection and antibodies.

Plasma (fresh frozen plasma, cryoprecipitate)

Plasma is the liquid part of blood containing important proteins. It may be required in acute bleeding where proteins in the plasma are reduced.

Plasma products

Plasma products are concentrated blood proteins. Each product has a specific purpose:

- Albumin helps maintain fluid levels.
- Immunoglobulins help the immune system.
- Clotting factors are for treating specific bleeding problems.

Are transfusions safe?

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood collects blood for transfusion in Australia from voluntary donors. Our blood supply is one of the safest in the world and most people will have no complications during or after their transfusion.

Although transfusions are generally very safe, there are some associated risks. However, precautions are taken to avoid any complications. There are three key risks to be aware of:

Having a reaction

Reactions are uncommon and can range from mild to severe. Mild reactions are the most common and include a rash or slight fever. Severe reactions include breathing difficulties, high fever and severe allergy (anaphylaxis).

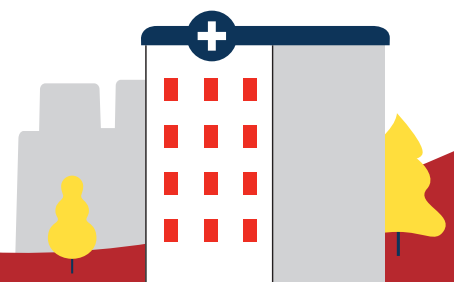
You will be carefully monitored during and after the transfusion. Alert the nursing staff if you have any concerns during the transfusion.

Catching an infection

In Australia, blood is carefully screened for infections. This includes screening donors and testing the blood after it has been donated. The risk of catching any diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV is less than one in a million.

Receiving the wrong blood product

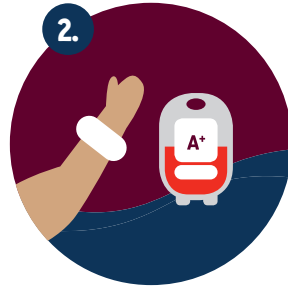
This is a rare occurrence and is usually caused by a checking error. This is prevented by multiple checks in the laboratory and at the bedside prior to beginning a transfusion. It is important that you are wearing an identification band throughout the process.



How is blood given?



1. You will need a small plastic tube inserted into a vein.



2. The blood product will be carefully checked to make sure it matches you and your blood type.



3. The transfusion will begin.



4. You will be closely monitored during and after transfusion.



5. The transfusion will take less than four hours.



6. If you have any concerns at any stage of the process, alert nursing staff immediately.

Frequently asked questions

How will I feel during a transfusion?

Most people do not feel any different during the transfusion. Sometimes you might feel uneasy or unwell during a transfusion. If you notice any symptoms or feelings you did not have before your transfusion began, let one of the nurses or your doctor know immediately so they can assess how your transfusion is going.

Will this transfusion affect me in the future?

From what we know so far, there are limited long-term effects. If you need a transfusion in the future, remember to mention that you have had one before as it may influence which blood is given.

Can a family member donate blood for me?

The risks from receiving blood from donors provided by Lifeblood is extremely low, so relatives' blood is not used. In addition, there are some increased risks of rare transfusion reactions when you receive blood from relatives.

What would happen without a transfusion?

A transfusion will be given only if medically necessary. For example, red cells carry oxygen and once anaemia becomes severe, your body may not be getting enough oxygen. This could lead to heart, kidney or brain problems. Please talk with your clinical team about any concerns.

