

YOU MIGHT NEED A TRANSFUSION

What is a transfusion?

When you receive blood, or blood components, it is called a transfusion. Blood components might be red cells, platelets or plasma. What you receive depends on your medical condition.

Where does the blood come from?

All donated blood used in blood transfusions in Australia comes from voluntary, unpaid donors and is collected by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service. All donors go through a careful screening process to ensure that it is safe for them to donate blood, and every blood donation is tested for a range of viruses and bacteria. The Blood Service separates blood into different components: red cells, plasma and platelets. Patients can then receive the blood component they need.

What are red blood cells?

Red blood cells are small cells full of a protein called haemoglobin. Haemoglobin transports oxygen from the lungs to all the cells in the body through the blood. Haemoglobin needs iron to function.

Why would I need a red blood cell transfusion?

Transfusions of red blood cells are used to treat patients with low haemoglobin (anaemia). There are many different causes for anaemia such as surgical blood loss.

Are there alternatives to transfusion?

Treating doctors determine when a transfusion is necessary. Sometimes giving iron or other medications is better than a transfusion. Improved surgical methods decrease bleeding and have helped reduce the need for blood transfusion. There are also products that can increase blood volume or improve clotting that are not made from blood components. Sometimes there is no alternative to a blood transfusion. If you do not want a blood transfusion it is extremely important to talk with your doctor about this as early as you can as they will need to plan ahead of your surgery date.

How is a transfusion given?

Before a transfusion begins, two staff members of the hospital or clinic will check your identity by ensuring your details on your wristband match the blood product to be transfused. It is important that you keep your wristband on at all times and let one of the health care staff know if you notice any mistakes on your wristband. Once this check has occurred, a needle is inserted in a vein in your hand or arm. The transfusion is given through a thin plastic tube into this needle. A nurse will check up on you during and after the transfusion.

How long does it take?

If you require a transfusion urgently, it will be given as fast as your body can tolerate. In non-urgent circumstances one pack of red cells is usually transfused over two hours.

How will I feel during the 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. Adverse transfusion reactions are uncommon. The most common reaction is a fever or mild rash which usually requires no treatment. Other very rare reactions are more severe and include anaphylaxis (severe allergy), breakdown of your own red cells (haemolysis), infection and severe breathing problems. Most reactions occur during the transfusion. This is why you are monitored during your transfusion and why you should let staff know if you're not feeling well.

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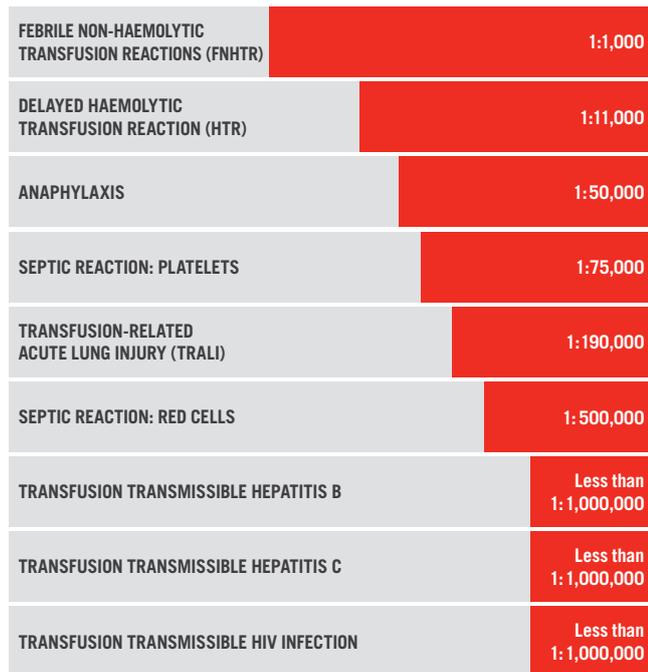
See overleaf for information about the relative risks of transfusion ►

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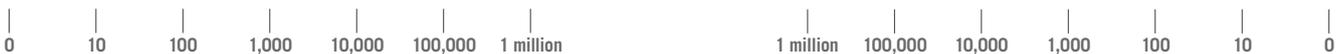
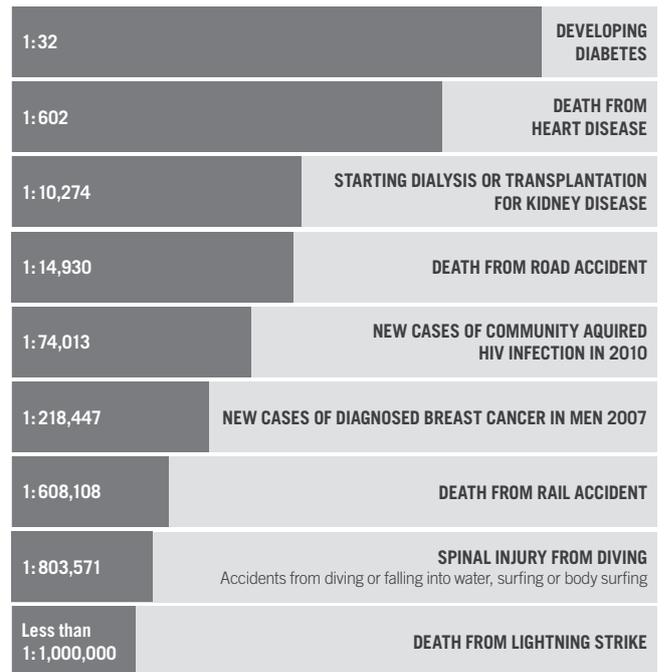
RELATIVE RISK OF TRANSFUSION

The risks from receiving a single unit transfusion compared with other health risks, based on Australian statistics.

TRANSFUSION RISKS



HEALTH RISKS



Transfusion risks

Australia has one of the safest blood supplies in the world. The risk of catching a virus from blood is very low, e.g. much less than 1 in a million for catching HIV. The chart (above) compares some risks of a transfusion with everyday risks based on Australian statistics. It also shows how often reactions occur.

The most avoidable risk with a transfusion is receiving the blood meant for someone else. Your identity is very important and you will be asked your name and details several times during the transfusion process. You should let someone know if your identification band has any errors – and please don't take it off.

Where can I find further information?

Further information can be found by visiting the website mytransfusion.com.au