



FAQs about BLOOD TRANSFUSION & SURGERY



With thanks to Michael

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion involves giving blood to a person using a tube that goes directly into a vein in the arm.

Is blood safe?

The blood you receive during a blood transfusion will come from a blood donor. All donors are voluntary and unpaid. They are very carefully tested to make sure that the blood they donate is as safe as possible.

Why do I need a blood transfusion?

Many operations will involve some loss of blood. In many cases, small amounts of blood can be replaced with other fluids, for example salt solutions. If there is a lot of bleeding during your surgery, a blood transfusion may be the best way of replacing blood rapidly.

Some operations cannot be safely carried out without a blood transfusion. Ask your doctor or nurse about your operation.

Is there an alternative to having a blood transfusion?

You may be anaemic due to a lack of iron. Iron tablets and sometimes injections may be given to correct this type of anaemia so that you are less likely to need a blood transfusion. In certain types of operations your own blood can be returned back to you (intra-operative cell salvage). Ask your doctor or nurse about this.

Can I refuse a blood transfusion?

You do have the right to refuse a blood transfusion. Some religious faiths may not allow blood transfusions and this will always be respected. However, before refusing a blood transfusion, you need to fully understand the consequences of doing so. The decision to give you a blood transfusion is made because it is absolutely necessary to ensure your safety and wellbeing. If you are worried about having a blood transfusion, your doctor or nurse will be able to explain the risks and benefits in your particular circumstances and any alternative forms of treatment available.

How long does a blood transfusion take?

A blood transfusion can take up to four hours but can be safely given more quickly if needed. Your doctor will decide on the length of time.

How will I feel during the blood transfusion?

You should not feel anything while the transfusion is being given. If you begin to feel unwell at any point during the transfusion, inform a member of nursing staff immediately.

How quickly will my blood transfusion make me feel better?

This depends on how unwell you are to start with, and on how low your blood count is. Some people notice a change immediately, while others find it takes a day or so for them to feel the benefit from their blood transfusion.

Can relatives donate blood for me?

Relatives or friends cannot donate blood for you. Studies have shown that blood taken from relatives (called directed donation) is no safer and may in fact be less safe than blood from volunteer donors who are very carefully selected and tested.

Where can I get more information?

Ask for a copy of the NHS patient information leaflet on receiving a blood transfusion. Many hospitals have specialist staff working in blood transfusion and your doctor or nurse could arrange for someone to come and talk to you.

Can I help myself?

Before you go into hospital, stay as active as possible and eat a well-balanced and nutritious diet (include foods that are rich in iron and vitamin C). Try to stop smoking and reduce your alcohol intake as this can help reduce the risk of complications during your operation.

Will there be enough blood?

Thanks to the support of over a million dedicated blood donors across the country, there is currently enough blood to treat all patients needing transfusions.

▶ The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) helps the NHS learn from its mistakes so that it can improve patient safety. We do this by collecting reports on errors and other things that go wrong in healthcare so that we can recognise national trends and introduce practical ways of preventing problems. The NPSA doesn't investigate individual cases or complaints, but we do listen to public concerns and use what you say to improve safety – your story could help prevent the same thing from happening to other people.

Visit www.npsa.nhs.uk/pleaseask to find out how you can help the NPSA make the NHS a safer place for patients. You can also find out about other organisations who can help if you want to make a complaint about your specific case.

