



Patient Blood Management Frequently Asked Questions for Patients

The following information is provided as a resource to patients who may need transfusion and to the health care professionals treating them. This document is provided by AABB in support of the Appropriate Use of Medical Resources initiative of the American Hospital Association's Physician Leadership Forum.

What is a blood transfusion?

A blood transfusion is a procedure in which a patient is given blood so that his or her body can function properly. The need for blood may be due to surgery, injury or a disease. A patient needing blood may be given whole blood or blood components — such as red cells, platelets or plasma — depending on his or her specific condition.

What is patient blood management?

Patient blood management (PBM) is an evidence-based, multidisciplinary approach to optimizing the care of patients who might need a transfusion. The goal of PBM is to administer blood to patients only when absolutely necessary.

What is the source of the donated blood?

Blood administered during a transfusion typically is obtained from one or more individuals who have voluntarily donated a small volume of blood for patients in need.

Why might my doctor recommend a transfusion?

A transfusion may be needed to replace blood that is lost as a result of surgery, injury or disease. Additionally, another illness or treatment such as cancer may cause you to become anemic. Anemia is a condition that occurs when the body has insufficient healthy red blood cells, which provide oxygen to body tissues.

Is it safe to receive a blood transfusion? What are the risks?

When used appropriately, blood can be lifesaving. However, as with any treatment or therapy, risks should be weighed with potential benefit. Receiving blood is safer today than it has ever been. Through stringent methods of selecting and testing blood donors, the risk of disease transmission through blood has been greatly minimized. However even the safest blood can cause your body to react in a way that affects your health. The most common transfusion reactions are allergic reactions and include symptoms such as itching, hives and chills. These mild to moderate reactions occur in less

than 1 percent of patients who are transfused and are rarely life-threatening. While exceedingly rare, more severe reactions can occur and may range from fever and nausea to kidney failure and death. Although the risk of any reaction is low, it is important that you talk with your doctor to better understand your care plan.

What can be done to reduce the possibility that I would need a transfusion?

There are various steps that can be taken before, during and after surgery. Basic pre-surgical steps include ensuring that you are not anemic when you undergo surgery. Additionally, your doctor may request that you take certain supplements or discontinue certain medications before surgery. It is important, however, that you do not start or stop taking medication without the advice of your doctor.

Should I donate blood for myself before having surgery?

Donating one's own blood before surgery is generally not advised, because this puts the individual at risk of becoming anemic. Anemia is most often the reason a patient is transfused and patients should avoid anything that contributes to pre-surgery anemia, as the condition can complicate the surgery and the patient's recovery. An increasing number of surgeons are using blood recovery techniques during surgery to return lost blood to the patient directly, thereby reducing the amount of transfused blood needed.

Is it good to ask someone I know to donate blood for me?

The safety of donated blood depends a great deal on the donor being truthful about any risky behaviors in which he or she has engaged. Family and friends may feel enormous pressure to donate blood even if they know that they should not do so based on their health history. Although the donated blood from a family member or friend is tested like any other blood, individuals are generally not advised to ask others to donate blood for them no matter how well they believe they know the person.

What should I do before a blood transfusion?

You should follow all of the instructions provided by your treating physician.

Are there alternatives to blood transfusions?

You should discuss any alternative therapies with your treating physician.

Other questions to ask your doctor:

- Might I need a blood transfusion? If so, why?
- What steps will be taken before, during and after my surgery to reduce the possibility of needing a transfusion?
- What policies have been implemented by the hospital to standardize the care of patients who might need a transfusion?
- Do I have any say in whether I get a transfusion?