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## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Being Your Own Blood Donor

This information explains how you can be your own blood donor. It describes what to expect before, during, and after you donate blood at the MSK Blood Donor Room.

During your surgery at MSK, your surgeon may need to give you a blood transfusion. A blood transfusion is when blood or blood cells are put into your body. You can donate your own blood for this before your surgery. This is called an autologous (aw-TAH-luh-gus) blood donation. Autologous means you donate your own blood so it can be stored and used for your transfusion if needed.

You may also get donated blood from the blood bank. This means the blood you get during your transfusion is donated by another person.

## Donating Blood at MSK

- It takes about 1 hour to donate blood. This time includes:
  - An interview with a staff member before the

donation. This interview will make sure you're able to donate blood.

- The blood collection, which takes about 20 minutes.
- Resting time after the donation.
- You can donate blood once a week, starting 35 days (5 weeks) before your surgery. You must stop donating 7 days before the date of your surgery. If you plan to make more than 1 donation, you must make them at least 7 days apart.
  - A blood donation expires 35 days (5 weeks) after it's collected.
- You may need more blood than the amount you were able to donate. If this happens, you can ask your friends and family to donate blood for you. If they donate, their blood will be tested to make sure it matches your blood type. Their blood will also be tested for diseases. This includes syphilis, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), human T-cell lymphotropic virus (HTLV), and hepatitis.
  - If their blood tests positive for any of these diseases, the donor will be told privately. Their blood will be thrown away.
  - If their blood is safe to donate but you don't need it, it will be added to the blood bank. Their blood can

be donated to other people.

- If you can get pregnant and have a partner who can get you pregnant, they shouldn't donate blood to you. That could cause problems if you get pregnant by this partner in the future. Talk with your healthcare provider about who can donate their blood to you.
- You may need more blood than the amount you have from donations. If this happens, you'll get blood from the blood bank.

## **Before you donate**

- You'll need to get permission from your healthcare provider to make autologous blood donations. Your healthcare provider will send this order to the MSK Blood Donor Room. They'll also make the appointments for you to donate. You must have an appointment each time you donate.
  - The Blood Donor Room is on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Schwartz Cancer Research Building at 1250 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. (between East 67<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> streets).
  - The Blood Donor Room is open for autologous blood donations Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Eat a full meal 1 to 2 hours before your donation appointment. It's also important to drink extra liquids

before your appointment. This will make the donation process easier and help you feel better as you donate.

- Bring a list of all the medications you're taking, including:
  - Prescription and over-the-counter medications, patches, and creams
  - Herbal remedies
  - Vitamins
  - Dietary supplements

## **Iron supplements**

Donating blood can cause mild anemia (low red blood cell count). If you have anemia, you may feel weak and tired. To prevent this, your healthcare provider may suggest you take an iron supplement before donating, such as ferrous sulfate.

Take 325 mg of ferrous sulfate (iron) 3 times a day with meals. You can buy it at a pharmacy without a prescription.

Common side effects of iron supplements can include:

- Constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual)
- Dark-colored stool (poop)

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
  - To prevent constipation, your healthcare provider may suggest you take a stool softener such as docusate sodium (Colace®). Take 100 mg of docusate sodium 3 times a day. You can buy it at a pharmacy without a prescription.

Don't take any supplements without talking with your healthcare provider first.

If you feel sick on the day of your donation, you may not be able to donate blood. If you're taking antibiotics on the day of your donation, you may not be able to donate blood. Antibiotics are medicines to treat infections. If this happens, call the MSK Blood Donor Room at 212-639-7648 before your donation. Ask to speak with a nurse.

## **During your donation**

The blood donation process will take about 1 hour from the time you arrive until you're ready to leave. The process will include these steps:

1. You'll fill out a form and provide basic information about yourself. You'll need to show identification with your name and photo or signature.
2. A staff member will check your blood pressure,

temperature, and iron level.

3. A staff member will also ask you questions about your health. This is to make sure you can donate blood that day.
4. You'll donate blood, which will take about 20 minutes.

## **After you donate**

- After your blood collection, you'll get juice and a light snack. This will help replace the fluids that you donated.
- Make sure to drink extra liquids to help replace the fluids that you donated. Drink water and liquids containing electrolytes (such as Gatorade<sup>®</sup>, Powerade<sup>®</sup>, and other sports drinks). Follow your regular diet.
- Don't do any strenuous exercise (such as lifting weights, running, or aerobics) for 24 hours after donating. You can do light exercise, such as walking.
- If you're taking both the iron supplement and docusate sodium, stop taking them 2 days before your surgery.
- You may have some bruising or irritation in the area where the needle was. If the bruising or irritation is bad or you become sick, call your healthcare provider

and the MSK Blood Donor Room.

For more information on blood transfusions, read the resource *About Your Blood Transfusion* ([https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/blood\\_transfusion](https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/blood_transfusion)).

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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