

Understanding Blood Transfusions



UHN

How to Choose What is Best for You

A **transfusion** is where we give you blood to make up for the blood lost during surgery. Your doctor will determine if there is a need for a blood transfusion.

He will examine your red blood cell count (hemoglobin) before the surgery and depending on the type of surgery and expected blood lost he will decide if there will be a possible need for a transfusion.

There are different ways in which you can increase your red blood cell count (hemoglobin). Your doctor will help you decide what is best for you.

The different choices are:

- 1. Receiving donated blood.**
- 2. Donating your own blood.**
- 3. Increasing the red blood cell count through diet and/or EPO injections.**
- 4. Recycling your own blood during your surgery.**

1. Receiving a transfusion of donated blood:

- This is when you receive blood from another person.
- Your blood type will be tested before your surgery and it is to match a donor's blood type.
- The blood that is correctly matched to yours is given to you during the surgery (if there is a need for it).

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How safe is the donor blood supply?

- All donated blood is tested for viruses like HIV and Hepatitis B and C. If the test result is not normal, the blood is rejected.
- There is still a very small chance you might get an infection or disease from a donated blood transfusion.

2. Donating your own blood:

- This is when you pre-donate and store your own blood before surgery.
- Your doctor will examine you and decide if you can donate your own blood.
- It will depend on your blood levels and your medical history.
- If you can donate your own blood, the doctor will talk to you about how and when this will be done.
- You will begin donating your blood at least 3 or 4 weeks before surgery.

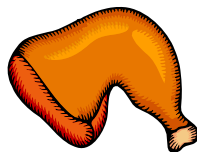
3. Increasing my red blood cell count before surgery

- Adding more iron to your diet or EPO injections will help you increase your red blood cell count.

Diet:

- Include more iron-rich food in your diet.

Examples of these foods include liver, lean beef, chicken or turkey (dark meat), dried fruits, whole grain cereals, and dark green leafy vegetables (spinach or broccoli).



Iron tablets:

- Your doctor may prescribe iron tablets before your surgery.
- Iron increases your red blood cell count.
- Taking it before meals with a glass of juice helps reduce the stomach pains you can get from taking this tablet.

For example, if you decide to donate your own blood or take EPO, your doctor will prescribe iron tablets.

EPO:

- EPO injections help your body make red blood cells. If your body makes more red blood cells before your surgery, you might not need a blood transfusion.
- Your doctor will explain the benefits and risks of EPO
- EPO will be prescribed to you.
- Your EPO treatments will be set up 3 or 4 weeks before surgery.
- You will visit your doctor or the hospital to get the EPO needle.
- You will get this needle once a week for 3 weeks before your surgery.

4. Recycling your own Blood during surgery

- This is when they collect, filter and return the blood that is normally lost during surgery back into you.
- Special equipment and techniques are used to do this.
- This is called recycling your own blood. Your surgeon will decide if this procedure is appropriate for your type of surgery.

For further information contact your doctor or the Perioperative Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator at (416) 603-5164.