

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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1. What is different about donating platelets and how long does it take?

It is now easier, and in many cases faster, to donate platelets. Only one of your arms is used to withdraw blood, separate out the platelets, and return the rest of the blood to you. Your other arm is free to turn pages in a book, click on a laptop keyboard, or scratch an itch during the 70 to 90 minute donation procedure.

This is in addition to the time it takes you to complete your registration form and have your medical history taken and reviewed. Plan to spend about 2 1/2 hours in the Blood Donor Room when you are donating platelets.

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2. Why do some cancer patients need platelets?

Some cancer treatments cause a loss of platelets. These specialized blood cells help control blood clotting. When platelet levels fall too low, patients may need a transfusion of platelets to replenish their supply and prevent life-threatening hemorrhages. Some patients, especially those who have had a bone marrow transplant or who are being treated for leukemia, may require daily platelet transfusions for several weeks.

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3. Is it safe to donate platelets?

Yes, it is safe to donate platelets. All needles and supplies used to collect platelets are sterile, disposable, and used only once — for you — before being discarded.

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4. Are there any special instructions I should follow before donating platelets?

You should eat a regular meal and drink plenty of fluids one to two hours before donating platelets. We also suggest that you increase your consumption of calcium-rich foods (such as dairy products) or take a calcium supplement the evening before your donation and also the morning of your donation.

Do not take aspirin or products containing aspirin for at least 72 hours before your appointment. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen) are acceptable.

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5. How often can I donate platelets?

You can donate platelets once within a seven-day period. You may donate up to six times in an eight-week period and 24 times a year.

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6. Can I give whole blood and also be a platelet donor?

Yes. Donor eligibility criteria are the same for both platelet and whole blood donors. You can donate platelets 7 days after donating whole blood. If you donate platelets first, you can donate whole blood 7 days later.

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