Being Your Own Blood Donor

This information explains how you can be your own blood donor at the Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) Blood Donor Room.

During your surgery at MSK, your doctor may need to give you a blood transfusion. You can donate your own blood for this before your surgery, or it will come from the blood bank. When it’s your own donated blood, it’s called an “autologous blood donation.”

Donating Blood at MSK

- It takes about 1 hour to donate blood. This time includes an interview with a staff member before the donation and resting time after the donation. This interview will make sure you’re able to donate blood. The blood collection takes about 20 minutes.

- You may donate blood once a week starting 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.

- If you need more blood than you were able to donate, 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. It will also be tested for diseases such as syphilis, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), human T-lymphotropic virus (HTLV), and hepatitis.
  - If you don’t need this blood, it will be added to the blood bank to be used for other people.

- If you’re a woman who can get pregnant, and you have a male partner, they
shouldn’t donate their blood to you. This is because it can increase your risk of problems with future pregnancies. Talk with your doctor about who can donate their blood to you.

- If you need more blood than the amount you have from donations, you will get blood from the blood bank.

**Before you donate**

- You will need to get permission from your doctor to make autologous blood donations. Your doctor or nurse will send this order to the Blood Donor Room. They will also make the appointments for you to donate. You must have an appointment each time you donate.
  - The MSK Blood Donor Room is located on the 1st floor of the Schwartz Research Building, at 1250 First Avenue, between East 67th Street and East 68th Street.
  - The donor room is open for autologous blood donations Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

- Eat a full meal 1 to 2 hours before your donation appointment and drink extra liquids. 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
  - Herbal remedies
  - Vitamins
  - Dietary supplements

**Iron supplements**

Donating blood can cause mild anemia (low levels of red blood cells). If you have anemia, you may feel weak and tired. To prevent this, your doctor may recommend that you take an iron supplement before donating.

You may need to take 325 mg of iron (ferrous sulfate) 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 stools, and nausea (feeling like you’re going to throw up).
  - To prevent constipation, your doctor may recommend that you take a stool softener such as docusate sodium (Colace®). Take 100 mg of docusate sodium orally (by mouth) 3 times a day. You can buy it at a pharmacy without a prescription.

Don’t take any supplements without talking with your doctor or nurse first.

If you feel sick or are taking antibiotics on the day of your donation, you may not be able to donate your blood. Call the MSK Blood Donor Room at 212-639-7648 before your donation and 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:

- First, you will fill out a form with basic information about yourself. You will need to show identification with your name and photo or signature.
- A staff member will check your blood pressure, temperature, and iron level.
- A staff member will also ask you questions about your health to make sure that you can donate blood that day.
- Then you will donate blood, which will take about 20 minutes.

**After you donate**

- After your blood collection, you will get juice and a light snack to help replace the fluids that you donated.
- Be sure to drink extra liquids and follow your regular diet.
- Avoid strenuous activities (such as lifting weights) and exercising for 24 hours after donating.
• If your doctor told you to take both the iron supplement and docusate sodium, stop taking them 2 days before your surgery.

• Call your doctor and the donor room if you become sick or have any other problems or concerns.


If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.