Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

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.

## About donating blood

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 we can store it and use it for your transfusion, if needed.

You may also get donated blood from the blood bank. This means the blood you get during your transfusion was donated by another person. Read *About Your Blood Transfusion* (www.mskcc.org/pe/about-blood-transfusion) to learn more about blood transfusions.

## Donating Blood at MSK

You can 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.

It takes about 1 hour to donate blood. This time includes:

- An interview with a staff member before the donation. This interview is to make sure you're able to donate blood.
- The blood collection. This takes about 20 minutes.
- Resting time after the donation.

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 blood, we will test it to make sure it matches your blood type. We will also test their blood for diseases. This includes:

- Syphilis.
- HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).
- Human T-cell lymphotropic virus (HTLV).
- Hepatitis.

If their blood tests positive for any of these diseases, we will tell the donor privately. Their blood cannot be used, and we will throw it away.

If their blood is safe to donate but you do not need it, we'll add it to the blood bank. Their blood can be donated to other people.

If you can get pregnant and your partner can get you pregnant, your partner should not donate blood to you. This could cause problems if you get pregnant by this partner in the future. Talk with your healthcare provider about who can donate 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.

# What to do before you donate blood

You'll need to get permission from your healthcare provider to make autologous blood donations. Your healthcare provider will send an order to the MSK Blood Donor Room. They will also make the appointments for you to donate. You must have an appointment each time you donate.

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.

You may not be able to donate blood if you feel sick or are taking antibiotics the day of your donation. 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.

## What to bring with you

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. You can buy it at a pharmacy without a prescription.

**Do not take any supplements without talking with your healthcare provider first.** Talk with your healthcare provider about how much iron to take.

Common side effects of iron supplements can include:

- Dark-colored stool (poop).
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up).
- Constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual). To prevent constipation, your healthcare provider may suggest you take a stool softener, such as docusate sodium (Colace®). Talk with your healthcare provider about how much to take.

**Do not take any supplements without talking with your healthcare provider first.**

## Where to go

Schwartz Cancer Research Building
1250 1st Ave. (between East 67th and 68th streets)
New York, NY 10065

The Blood Donor Room is open for autologous blood donations Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

# During your blood 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 if you're able to. This will take about 20 minutes.

# After you donate blood

After your blood donation, you'll get juice and a light snack. This will help replace the fluids that you donated. Make sure to drink extra liquids the rest of the day to help replace the fluids that you donated. Drink water and liquids that have electrolytes, such as Gatorade®, Powerade®, and other sports drinks. Follow your regular diet.

Do not do any strenuous exercise for 24 hours after donating blood. This includes lifting weights, running, or aerobics. 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 get sick, call your healthcare provider and the MSK Blood Donor Room.

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.

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

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