

Aide memoire for patients receiving blood transfusions - Tips to help enhance transfusion safety

What can you do to stay safe?

Transfusions

1. **Correct identification**

Staff must check your identification (first name, surname, date of birth and unique identification number; in Wales, you will be asked your home address as well) before blood sampling and before transfusion. Accurate identification prevents transfusion errors and wrong components from being transfused. You should challenge any healthcare worker who does not ask and check your name and date of birth.

2. **Bring any red cell antibody cards you may have been given in the past.**

It can help your treating team keep your records up to date and help you get blood that is appropriate for you.

3. **Make sure your clinician knows about any allergic reactions or any adverse reactions you have had to transfusions in the past. Also make sure that the clinician knows about any special transfusion requirements you may have (e.g., need for irradiated blood components).**

This can help you to avoid getting a transfusion that could harm you.

4. **Make sure your treating team are aware of your medications, especially blood thinners and aspirin/related medications.**

Some of these medications may impact transfusion decisions.

5. **Labelling of blood samples must be done accurately, in your presence and must be legible. They must contain your identification details.**

Labelling errors can result in the sample being rejected by the transfusion laboratory and you may need to attend for another blood test. There is also a risk of wrong transfusion if samples aren't labelled correctly. You should challenge any healthcare worker who takes a sample but doesn't label it by your side.

6. **Ask for information about your planned transfusions in terms you can understand—both when blood components for your transfusion are prescribed and when you get them:**

- What is the transfusion for?
- What blood component/s is/are being transfused?
- How is it going to be given and how long will it take for the transfusion?
- What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur especially when I am back home?
- Are there any alternatives to transfusion?
- Are there any precautions that I need to be aware of?

7. **Ask for written information about the transfusion which provides information about risks, benefits, and alternatives. If you have any questions about the transfusion, ask.**

If you know what might happen, you will be better prepared if it does or if something unexpected happens.

Several patient information leaflets about blood transfusions are available and can be accessed using this link: <https://hospital.blood.co.uk/patient-services/patient-blood-management/patient-information-leaflets/>

8. Understand that "more" is not always better.

It is a good idea to find out why a test or treatment including transfusion is needed and how it can help you. Not all tests or transfusions are essential.

9. When the blood component is being connected prior to administration, ask is this what has been prescribed/authorised for me.

You should challenge any healthcare professional who has not checked your name and date of birth, as stated by you, against the unit and the prescription.

10. You will be monitored regularly during your transfusion. Unless essential, routine transfusions will be carried out during "normal working" hours. Ask for help if you feel unwell during a transfusion and speak up if you have any concerns regarding your transfusion and/or monitoring.

11. When you are being discharged from the hospital, ask your clinician to explain the treatment and follow up plan after discharge.

This includes information about any delayed complications, making sure you know when to schedule follow-up appointments. Make sure a transfusion summary including any special requirements and reactions you may have had are recorded in the discharge summary and ask about it if it isn't there.

12. If you have had a blood test, do not assume that no news is good news.

Ask how and when you will get the results.

13. Learn about your condition and treatments by asking your doctor and nurse and by using other reliable sources such as NHS fact sheets/websites.

Please do not hesitate to speak up if you have any questions or concerns.

*The term "clinician" is used in this leaflet to refer to the person who helps you manage your health care which could be a doctor, a nurse, midwife, or other trained healthcare worker.

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<https://www.ahrq.gov/questions/resources/20-tips.html>

