

In addition, the New Zealand Blood Service reserves the right not to collect blood from patients where it might be unsafe for our medical and laboratory staff to handle a donated unit. If any units are found to be positive for HIV, hepatitis or in any way unsuitable, they will be discarded to prevent accidental issue and so protect the blood supply.

### **How often can I give?**

If required and it is safe, you may be able to donate a maximum of 4 units of blood. Normally, we like a minimum gap of one week between donations. The final donation should be given at least 48 hours before the planned date of surgery.

### **Where can I make an autologous blood donation?**

NZBS will make arrangements with your Surgeon once a decision to operate has been made. A number of approaches might be used -the blood may be donated at a NZBS Donor Centre, at your local hospital or at one of our mobile donation venues.

### **What is the procedure to make an autologous blood donation?**

To make arrangements to donate blood you must first have a firm date for your operation. Autologous transfusion is only considered for operations where there is a significant likelihood of a blood transfusion being needed. A recommendation from your Doctor or Surgeon is required stating that you wish to provide an autologous donation in preparation for a planned operation and that you are fit to provide blood for yourself.

The actual donation process is similar to that faced by hundreds of blood donors each day:

- complete a Standard Blood Donor Form which is used for identification and processing purposes
- undertake a check of your haemoglobin levels using a finger prick test of a drop of your blood
- donate a unit of blood (approximately 470mls) which takes about 10 minutes
- rest on the chair for another 10 minutes
- have refreshments before you leave the donor rooms

The entire process takes around one hour.

### **What happens to my blood if I do not use it?**

If you do not use your autologous unit, it is discarded after 35 days when the blood is no longer viable. No one else will use your blood.

### **Can I become a regular blood donor?**

In some cases, this will be possible. Talk to the Blood Donor staff about joining the 136,000 active blood donors in New Zealand who regularly give “the gift of life”.

You can also help our work by encouraging your friends and relatives to become voluntary blood donors.

If you would like further information please ask your Doctor or your local Blood Donation Centre or call 0800 GIVEBLOOD (0800 448 325).

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# Providing Blood for Yourself



Your guide  
to blood  
transfusion

**You have been given this leaflet because you have indicated an interest in giving blood for your own use – an autologous blood collection – for an upcoming operation.**

**As with any treatment you have the right to decide whether you want to have the treatment or not. You will be asked to sign a Consent Form to show that:**

- the benefits, risks and alternatives for your treatment, including transfusion of blood products, have been explained to you,
- you have been able to ask any questions about the treatment, and
- you agree to receive the treatment.

*This leaflet answers common questions about the autologous donation itself, blood transfusion in general and it may help you discuss any concerns you may have.*

### **Do I have to donate my own blood?**

No. Volunteer donor blood is always available for you. Even if you decide to give blood for an autologous transfusion it might be necessary to supplement this with blood donated by volunteer donors. In most clinical settings the benefits of autologous blood are not great. Some patients, for a number of reasons, however prefer to donate blood for themselves. NZBS is happy to respect this choice. In effect autologous transfusion can be considered as a form of insurance policy.

However, if you choose to adopt this approach you will be required to meet the full costs of providing the service. There is an autologous service fee for collecting, processing, storing and distributing autologous blood. The autologous blood service fee is charged to cover the actual costs involved.

For patients with rare blood groups or complicated antibody problems, autologous blood may be the only

means of providing compatible blood. In addition, autologous transfusions may be an acceptable alternative for some patients who refuse blood transfusions for religious, cultural or for other reasons. In these settings, a charge to the patient will not apply.

### **How safe is volunteer donor blood?**

Blood donations in New Zealand are provided by volunteer, unpaid donors who meet strict health and lifestyle criteria. In addition, every unit of blood is screened to check for hepatitis B and C, HIV/AIDS, syphilis and other blood borne diseases like HTLV, as they are required.

Blood available for transfusion in New Zealand is amongst the safest in the world. The risk of acquiring a serious chronic infection is now very small indeed:

- The risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS is less than 1 case in every 1,000,000 transfusions in New Zealand. No cases have been reported in NZ since testing started in 1985.
- For hepatitis B and C, the risk is estimated as less than 1 in 100,000 transfusions (less than 1 case per year in New Zealand).

These risks are no greater than the risks people experience in every day life and from other medical treatments and procedures.

### **What are the benefits of autologous transfusion?**

Receiving your own blood avoids some of the risks of a blood transfusion such as:

- you can be assured that the blood you receive will be perfectly compatible with your blood
- it is unlikely that there will be any allergic reactions
- it eliminates the very low risk of acquiring an infectious disease from the blood of another person

### **Are there any risks?**

Yes, this is the case with any clinical procedure. Autologous transfusion does not remove all of the risks associated with transfusion. In particular:

- Bacterial infection can occur. The risk is at least as great as for normal blood transfusion. In New Zealand this is now the most frequent serious complication of blood transfusion.
- Despite our best efforts, errors in the ward or laboratory do occasionally happen. The risk of this happening is at least as great as with an ordinary transfusion.
- We treat your own blood in the same way as blood donated by volunteers. The same safety criteria are applied. If problems occur during testing, storage or transportation of your unit then we may not be able to return your own blood to you.
- If your surgery is cancelled or the date changes then the blood may no longer be suitable for transfusion.

There are also risks associated with giving your own blood. Fainting following donation occurs more frequently when you give blood for autologous use.

It is also important to remember that a decision to allow you to donate your own blood is not the same as a commitment not to transfuse you with donor blood if required. If you feel strongly about this then you must talk to the Doctor responsible for your care.

### **Is everyone suitable to have autologous blood collected?**

No. For some patients the risk of donation will exceed the small benefit of autologous transfusion. Every request for autologous transfusion is assessed by a Doctor to ensure that it is safe and appropriate for you to donate blood for yourself. Some reasons why you might not be able to donate include patients with anaemia, unstable cardiac conditions, very poor veins, bacterial infections and some forms of cancer.