

# Your guide to giving platelets

## They're a lifeline for seriously ill patients

### What are platelets?

Platelets are tiny fragments of cells made in your bone marrow. So tiny, in fact, that you'll find about 250 million of them in every millilitre of blood. They clump together to stop bleeding, seal wounds and help 'plug' leaks in damaged blood vessels.

### Why is giving platelets so important?

People with leukaemia or going through treatments like chemotherapy can have their platelet counts become so low that they have spontaneous bleeding. Even a small amount of bleeding is dangerous, but especially if it happens in the brain.

You actually give a small amount of platelets in most regular blood donations, as each donation can be separated into red cells, plasma and platelet concentrate. But, you can give 4-12 times as many platelets when you make a dedicated platelet donation — and often it takes that much to make one life-giving treatment.

**Platelets only last five days once donated, so we always need more of them.**

### What happens when I give platelets?

- Our special machine draws your blood with brand new equipment.
- The machine then separates and collects the precious platelets, and some plasma too, before returning the other blood components (red and white cells) and the majority of plasma.
- This happens several times over about an hour and it's all done through the same needle. Take the time to relax and catch up on some reading, make the most of our free Wi-Fi or listen to music.

### How often can I give platelets?

Because we can return your red blood cells, it affects your haemoglobin and iron levels less than when you give blood. That means you can donate as often as every two weeks.

### When do we need platelets?

Constantly — but especially around Christmas, Easter, and other public holidays, when many donors take a holiday, but patients don't get a break from needing platelets. And with donated platelets only lasting five days, there's even more pressure on supplies.

### Are there side-effects?

Since we can return your red blood cells, there's less chance that your iron levels will become depleted than with giving blood. To make sure you have enough platelets to give, we take additional blood samples with your donations to check that your platelet count is OK.

To help your donation go smoothly, we use anticoagulant — an anti-clotting agent that helps blood flow through the tubes in our machines. When we return your red cells (and the other non-platelet blood components), you'll receive a little of this anticoagulant too. Sometimes it can cause a slight tingling sensation around your lips and nose. These symptoms usually disappear in minutes. The calcium supplement we offer helps prevent these symptoms, so please take the supplement when offered it by our staff.

One of our trained staff members will be making sure you're OK during your donation. If there's any cause for concern or you feel unwell, or uncomfortable, they can stop the process at any time.

### Who can donate platelets?

To make giving platelets as safe as possible for the donor and the recipient, we can only commence collection of platelets from registered male plasma donors who've given a previous plasma donation in the last 12 months and who don't take any medication that affects their platelets.

To minimise the risk of a rare — but sometimes fatal — condition called transfusion-related acute lung injury (TRALI), women cannot give a dedicated platelet donation as TRALI is thought to be caused by antibodies (proteins produced by the immune system which attack foreign substances) found more commonly in the blood of women. TRALI can lead to breathing difficulties and low blood oxygen in patients after a transfusion.

#### Generally, to give platelets you must:

- have given at least one successful plasma donation in the last 12 months (before you give platelets for the first time)
- be 18-75 years old (if you're male) for your first donation
- weigh at least 50 kg
- not have had recent dental work
- not have taken aspirin five days before — or other anti-inflammatory medications 3 days before — your donation
- not have had a recent gastric upset, diarrhoea, abdominal pain or vomiting
- not have travelled to a country with a malarial risk in the last four months, and
- have plenty of liquid in the 24 hours prior to donation, especially in warm weather, and drink 750 mL of water (3 large glasses) in the 3 hours before you get to the blood donor centre.

There may be other reasons why you can't give platelets right now — if you're a registered blood donor, these should be on your donor record. If you're unsure, just call us on **13 14 95** or ask our team at the blood donor centre. We're happy to help.