

Preparing for surgery and decreasing your need for blood transfusion

Patient Blood Management Program Hamilton Health Sciences

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Blood transfusion – you have options ...

Deciding to have surgery or making a decision about treatment for an illness is not easy. To help you make these decisions it is important to first discuss with your doctor what options are available and to know the risks and benefits of those options. This is known as informed choice or informed consent.

Informed consent may involve discussing with your doctor the possible need for a blood transfusion due to your surgery or treatment plan. This pamphlet gives you options that may help you decrease or avoid your chance of needing a blood transfusion. Together, you and your doctor can decide what is right for you.

What does blood do in my body?

Blood contains red blood cells which bring oxygen to your organs and tissues, allowing you to stay active and healthy. Oxygen is carried and released by an iron-rich substance called hemoglobin found inside the red blood cells.

Anemia and surgery

- Anemia is the medical term that means that you do not have enough red blood cells and your hemoglobin is below normal.
- When there are not enough red blood cells, you have less hemoglobin to carry oxygen throughout your body. Your body's tissues do not get enough oxygen and this affects how your heart, lungs, kidneys and brain work.
- Anemia can leave you feeling very tired, weak, cold, short of breath or lightheaded.
- If you are anemic before surgery, you are at greater risk of not having enough red blood cells during or after surgery.
- Being anemic before surgery increases the chances that you will need a blood transfusion while you are in the hospital.
- Blood is lost during surgery – the amount can depend on the type of surgery.

Blood transfusion

Blood transfusion is a medical procedure in which donated blood is given into your bloodstream and will only take place if your doctor orders it. At times it can be life saving but like all medical procedures it has risks.

What is patient blood management?

Patient blood management is a team approach that focuses on optimizing the care of patients who might need a blood transfusion. This is done through combinations of diet, supplements, drugs, medical devices and surgical techniques.

The plan chosen for you will depend on:

- your medical condition
 - the surgery you need
 - your risk of needing a blood transfusion with or after surgery
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How can I decrease my need for blood transfusion?

To reduce or avoid the need for blood transfusion, your health care team works with you to plan the best way to:

- improve your own blood supply
- decrease the amount of bleeding during surgery

There are several effective ways to decrease the need for a blood transfusion before surgery. These include:

- taking iron or other vitamin supplements
- eating iron rich foods
- drugs - A medication called Erythropoietin (also referred to as 'Epo' or 'Eprex') may be used to help your body make more blood cells. It is given by injection (needle) before surgery to some patients who have anemia. Talk with your doctor to see if this medication will work for you.

Your doctor may also ask you to stop taking certain drugs before surgery so that bleeding during surgery is reduced. Your doctor will need to know the drugs you are taking such as:

- aspirin
- anti-inflammatory medications
- anticoagulants – blood thinners
- vitamin and herbal supplements

Sometimes, several things are done together. No single approach is right for everyone.

Your health care team works together to choose the best plan for you.

