

# Care before and after your Phlebotomy

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A phlebotomy is a procedure to remove a specific amount of blood from a vein in your arm. Generally, one unit of blood (about 2 cups or 500 mls) is removed. Two common reasons for doing a phlebotomy are to remove excess iron or red blood cells from the circulation.

You may need phlebotomy weekly or less often, depending on your blood results and how you are feeling. Your doctor will tell you how often you need one.

## **Before your phlebotomy**

Before having the phlebotomy it is a good idea to drink plenty of fluids to replace the fluid that will be removed and eat a substantial snack 1 hour before you come (for example, a muffin or a sandwich). The nurse will start the intravenous (IV) tube in your arm and attach it to a blood bag to do the phlebotomy. The nurse will watch you and take your blood pressure and heart rate throughout the procedure. The phlebotomy usually takes about an hour. We suggest that you bring your own juice to drink during your treatment.

## **After your phlebotomy**

After the phlebotomy your nurse will remove your IV and put a gauze bandage on your arm. You will be observed by the nurse for 15 to 30 minutes. This is done to watch for and treat possible side effects. You may feel a little weak, dizzy or faint after the procedure. For this reason, you will be asked to stay seated or lie down for 5 minutes before standing up. You will also be encouraged to drink fluids. The nurse will give you instructions about your care at home. Please ask any questions that you may have.

## **After you leave the hospital, follow these instructions:**

1. Eat something once you are at home. Drink lots of fluids (up to 2 litres or 8 cups a day) to replace the fluid removed during the phlebotomy.
2. Do not smoke after your phlebotomy for 1 to 2 hours because smoking may increase your chances of feeling dizzy.
3. Limit any strenuous exercise or activity of the arm used for the procedure for 24 hours after your phlebotomy.
4. Do not remove the gauze bandage at the phlebotomy site for at least 12 hours after the procedure. If there is active bleeding from the phlebotomy site, apply pressure for at least 15 minutes.
5. If you feel faint while standing, lie or sit down with your head between your knees for a few minutes. Change positions slowly to limit dizziness.
6. Do not do any vigorous physical activity for 24 hours after the phlebotomy.

Contact your doctor or seek medical help if you have any of the following:

1. Faintness that does not go away.
2. Active bleeding at the phlebotomy site which is not stopped by 15 minutes of pressure.
3. Chest pain. Seek medical help right away.

If you have a medical emergency call 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department that serves adults. If you live in Hamilton, adults may go to the Emergency Department at Hamilton General Hospital, Juravinski Hospital or St. Joseph's Healthcare. The Emergency Department at McMaster University Medical Centre is only for children ages 17 and under.