

Sometimes people with cancer and other diseases can develop a lowering in the amount of red blood cells circulating in the body. This is called anaemia. It can also occur as a result of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. If the levels of your red blood cells (haemoglobin) become low, you may feel tired and become breathless and dizzy. This happens because the level of oxygen carried round your body is decreased.

If you have any of these symptoms, you might need a blood test, known as a Full Blood Count (FBC), to check your haemoglobin level (Hb).



## NORTH · LONDON HOSPICE

### **North London Hospice in Finchley**

47 Woodside Avenue  
London N12 8TT

### **North London Hospice in Enfield**

110 Barrowell Green  
London N21 3AY

Phone: 020 8343 8841

Fax: 020 8343 7672

Email: [nlh@northlondonhospice.co.uk](mailto:nlh@northlondonhospice.co.uk)

[www.northlondonhospice.org](http://www.northlondonhospice.org)

Registered Charity No. 285300

v1 Printed:  
Latest review:

June 2013  
June 2016

NORTH·LONDON  
HOSPICE



**Blood & Platelet Transfusions  
at North London Hospice**

# Why are blood transfusions given?

If your haemoglobin is low, a blood transfusion could be offered to help relieve your symptoms. The extra red cells from the transfusion should help your lungs pick up more oxygen to transport around your body. As a result, you should feel less dizzy and breathless and have more energy.

## What happens when I have a transfusion?

If the Hospice team feels that you would benefit from a transfusion, they will discuss this with you. If you agree, a blood sample will be taken to check your haemoglobin level and identify your blood group, to make sure you receive blood that is compatible to you.

The sample is taken at least one day before you receive your transfusion. Once we have the results, we can work out how many bags (also known as units for blood, or pools for platelets) you will receive. Depending on this, your transfusion will take between 1-2 days. As each bag takes approximately 3 hours to complete, the Hospice can only give 2 bags per day, as blood cannot be stored on site. Blood is collected from Barnet Hospital each morning, Monday to Friday only.

On the day of your transfusion, a nurse will check your blood pressure, pulse, temperature and breathing rate before the transfusion begins. This helps

us monitor the effect the new blood is having on you.

A doctor or nurse will insert a small needle (cannula) into a vein in your arm or hand.

Before the transfusion, two nurses will independently check the details on the blood bag against your name band and NHS number, ensuring that the blood is the correct match for you.

To make sure there is no adverse reaction to the new blood, a nurse will stay with you for the first fifteen minutes of the transfusion. Your blood pressure, pulse, temperature and breathing rate will also be monitored at regular intervals throughout the process and again one hour after the transfusion finishes.

## What reactions can occur?

Common side effects are:

- Headache
- Slight rise in temperature
- Skin rash

If you are to receive more blood, your cannula will be cleaned and bandaged, ready for use the following day. It will be checked again before the next transfusion begins. If no more transfusions are planned the cannula will be removed.

If you have had any of these reactions in the past, please inform nursing or medical staff. You may need medication to prevent them. This will be discussed with you prior to the transfusion.

Paracetamol may be given if you experience a rise in your temperature.

## **Can I get an infection from the donated blood?**

All blood is carefully screened and treated before it arrives at the Hospice so infections are extremely rare.

## **Can I receive more than one transfusion?**

Your response to the blood transfusion(s) will influence how we treat your symptoms of anaemia in the future. The medical team will discuss this with you to see if you feel you have gained any benefits. If it has helped, further transfusions would be considered. If not, we wouldn't offer you any more transfusions.

## **Can all blood transfusions be given at the Hospice?**

Unfortunately not.

Some people may have increased risks which need a higher level of monitoring than we can offer, especially if they have had repeated transfusions in the past.

There are many other reasons why it may not be possible to have your transfusion at the Hospice but our medical team will always liaise with your hospital consultant team to discuss possible options available to you.

## **Platelet transfusions**

Platelets help the blood to clot and prevent bleeding. If the numbers of platelets are low, you may bruise easily and bleed heavily from minor cuts and bruises.

Those affected by low platelets include:

- People with leukaemia
- People who have had bone marrow transplants
- People who have had high dose chemotherapy

Normally, one or two bags of platelets are given at a time, over a much shorter time period than blood. Each bag takes about 20-30 minutes.

A nurse will check your blood pressure, pulse, breathing rate and temperature before and one hour after the transfusion only.

**IF YOU FEEL AT ALL UNWELL DURING YOUR TRANSFUSION, PLEASE TELL A NURSE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

If you have any further questions about blood or platelet transfusions please contact the Hospice team caring for you. We are always happy to address any concerns or questions you may have.

