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ALL ABOUT Apheresis Platelet Donations



Are you interested in becoming an apheresis platelet donor?

What are platelets?

There are three different types of cells in our blood - red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. Platelets play a very important part in stopping bleeding in our bodies by forming 'plugs' at the sites of blood vessel injuries.

Why are platelet donations needed?

Some patients have very low platelet counts, either because their bone marrow cannot produce enough, or the platelets are being destroyed in their blood streams. This results in these people being more prone to uncontrollable bleeding as they are unable to stop this process.

Patients that need platelet transfusions include people who have cancer, liver disease, burns and trauma.

How do you donate platelets?

The platelet donation process is quite different to normal whole blood donation in a number of ways:

- A needle is placed in your arm and you are connected to an apheresis machine.
- Your blood is drawn into the apheresis machine, and some of your platelets and plasma are removed.
- The rest of your blood is returned to your circulation via the needle.
- This process is repeated in cycles and the entire procedure takes about 90 minutes.

As you are required to sit in an armchair for a long time, refreshments and visual entertainment are provided for you.

Is platelet donation safe?

Like normal blood donation, you can have side effects such as bruising, a painful arm or fainting.

Some people also experience symptoms such as tingling around their mouth or spasms in their hands - this is due to a drop in their calcium levels from exposure to the substance (called citrate) that prevents the blood from clotting in the tubing of the machine. This can be prevented by having calcium supplemented drinks at the start of the donation.

Your body will fully replace the platelets that you have donated within about two days, and you can donate platelets every four weeks.

What does it take to become a platelet donor?



You need to meet all our regular donor criteria and should have comfortably donated whole blood at least five times before.



You need to have easily accessible veins.



You need to have a flexible schedule that can allow you to donate on weekday mornings.



You cannot use aspirin or anti-inflammatory medication within 72 hours of donating, as these can affect the functioning of your platelets.

If you meet these criteria, please express your interest to our staff who will take a blood sample to check that your platelet count is high enough to be an apheresis donor.

Where and when do platelet donations take place?

- These are currently only collected at our premises in Pinelands, Cape Town.
- Opening hours: Monday to Friday 07:00 - 15:00.
- The last donation must be completed by 13:00 for the samples to undergo testing and be released to the blood banks on the same day.

What are designated platelet donations?

There are certain circumstances where people are selected from the South African Bone Marrow Registry to donate platelets for a specific patient - this is called a 'designated' or 'HLA matched' platelet donation. The reason for doing this is that the patient has developed platelet antibodies so needs to receive transfusions from a donor whose platelets closely match theirs.

For more information about becoming a platelet donor, please contact the Apheresis Unit at the Western Cape Blood Service on (021) 507 6300 or info@wcbs.org.za.