



Giving platelets

What are
platelets,
and how
you can
help

What are platelets?

One of the four main blood components, platelets stop bruising and bleeding. Many of Scotland's patients need platelet transfusions, including cancer and leukaemia patients, premature babies and emergency admissions.

However, platelets can only be stored for seven days, so we're always looking for new donors to keep a steady supply available to Scottish hospitals.

How platelets save lives

As a newborn baby, Skye Edwards needed platelets as part of her treatment for a mystery illness.

Mum Gemma, said: **“Within 24 hours of being born Skye went really downhill; we were told everything was going wrong. Her platelet level was only seven when it should normally be between 150 and 450, and with anything below 20 there's a danger of bleeding out.”**

Now, after a total of five platelet transfusions and two blood transfusions,



Skye's bone marrow is working as it should be. **“We get to see her grow up, sit, walk, talk, go to school. All of this is possible because someone in Scotland is selfless enough to give up their time for some stranger out there.”**

Who can give platelets?

Platelet donors must be:

- male, however some regional centres are also looking for female donors. Please speak to your local team at your next donation. They will be able to advise if female donors are currently needed
- blood group A positive, A negative or O positive
- at least 60kg
- existing blood donors (must have donated blood at least once before)
- able to donate at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow donor centre every four weeks or so
- willing to spare up to 90 minutes each time they give platelets.

What else do I need to know?

Platelet donation is a little bit different to giving blood. We use a machine which collects the blood then separates the individual components and returns the

red blood cells, white blood cells and some plasma back to the donor. The whole process takes no longer than 90 minutes.

Before you can give platelets regularly, we will test a sample of your blood to find out what your platelet type is. This helps us match your platelets to patients with specific needs.

You must wait at least four weeks after whole blood donation before giving platelets.

Most donors give platelets every four to six weeks, giving your body ample time to restore iron levels. We appreciate this is a greater time commitment than donating blood, but it makes a big difference to patients across Scotland.

In certain cases, your platelet type may be a special match for a specific patient in hospital. This means we may call on you to help them by donating on a given day.

We ask female donors to give additional samples to look for HLA and HNA antibodies. These antibodies can cause a severe reaction in patients, called Transfusion-Related Acute Lung Injury (TRALI). We can only accept you for platelet donation if your antibody tests are negative. Usually someone with HLA or HNA antibodies can continue to give whole blood donations, but very occasionally we will ask them to stop giving blood altogether.

What next?

A member of our team will arrange some additional checks for you. Platelet donors must meet additional criteria including:

- strong veins that will tolerate the specialist machine that collects your blood and returns some blood components back to you
- a suitable platelet count
- height, weight and haemoglobin levels that meet targets determined by the specialist machine that collects your blood.

What should I do before donating?

Keeping hydrated is the best way to avoid fainting. Make sure you've had plenty to drink before coming to donate, and we'll also give you 500ml of water to drink when you arrive. This might seem a lot, but we know it will make you less likely to feel faint.

Don't donate on an empty stomach - make sure you've eaten well before you come. However, avoid fatty, oily or greasy meals as these can affect the quality of your platelets

Avoid using ibuprofen, aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Paracetamol and codeine-based medicines are fine.

Are there any risks associated with giving platelets?

Most of the risks of platelet donation are similar to the risks associated with blood donation. Side effects can sometimes include:

- **Bruising and pain:** Most pain and bruising is minor, and symptoms settle quickly with no or simple measures. Fewer than 1 in 50 donations lead to bruising.
- **Feeling faint:** Around 1 in 80 donations lead to donors feeling faint. New blood donors are more likely to be affected, **however** drinking plenty of clear fluids (at least 500ml) before donation significantly reduces the likelihood of fainting.
- **Citrate effect:** Citrate is a blood thinner which occurs naturally in the body. It is added to the donation to prevent blood clotting. A small amount is returned to the donor with their red cells. Most donors feel no side effects, but some may feel tingling around their mouth, fingertips or toes, a metallic taste, or chills. These effects are easily managed by slowing the procedure down.

- Other complications of donation include severe pain, arm inflammation, injury of a nerve or a punctured artery. These are rare, occurring in fewer than 1 in 1,000 donations.
- Sometimes the procedure may have to be stopped prematurely. This can be if we cannot get a good blood flow or if you experience some side effects, such as bruising. If this happens, you may need to wait before you can donate again, our staff will advise you if this is the case.

If you become at all uncomfortable during your donation, it is vital you let a member of staff know. Our team is trained to take the best possible care of you.

Where can I give platelets?

Aberdeen Blood Donor Centre

Foresterhill Road, Aberdeen AB25 2ZW

Edinburgh Blood Donor Centre

41 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh EH3 9HB

Glasgow Blood Donor Centre

8 Nelson Mandela Place, Glasgow G2 1BT

I'm interested - how do I sign up?

To find out more, use the contact us form at scotblood.co.uk or email us at nss.snbtSENquiry@nhs.scot. One of our platelet recruitment team will get in touch.

Alternatively, call us 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday, on **0345 90 90 999**.

Contact us

t: 0345 90 90 999

e: nss.snbtSENquiry@nhs.scot

w: scotblood.co.uk

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