

## Storing Blood before Elective Surgery

If you're having elective surgery, among the many things on your mind may be the possibility you will need a blood transfusion. Although using donor blood has become very safe in the last decade, there is one sure way to calm any lingering anxiety: donate your own blood to be used in the event you need it during surgery.

This simple process has a complicated name: *autologous blood donation*. Your own blood definitely further reduces the risk of disease transmission and allergic reactions that may rarely occur with transfusion. Autologous blood is stored just for you— it's discarded if you don't end up using it.

The first question to ask your surgeon before deciding whether to donate blood is how likely it is you will need a transfusion. Some operations—heart and orthopedic surgery, certain cancer surgery—lead to more blood loss than others such as minimal access, laparoscopic procedures.

If your doctor confirms the planned surgery may require a transfusion, then ask if you are a good candidate to safely donate blood. Usually, pregnant women, those with infections, or children under ten are considered high risk. Once your surgeon gives you the green light for your red blood, you need to:

- Get orders from the doctor to give the hospital or blood bank where you are donating.
- Be sure to donate within 35 days of your scheduled surgery but no later than five days prior.
- Find out how much processing your donation will cost (you usually have to pay for donating your own blood!)

Ask your doctor if you should take extra vitamins or supplements. She might suggest iron tablets, Folic acid, and Vitamin C.

The bottom line? “You don't absolutely *need* to donate your own blood before surgery,” says [Emile Bacha, MD](#), Chief, Division of Cardiac, Thoracic, and Vascular Surgery, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, “but you might *want* to for your peace of mind.”