

MYTHS VS. FACTS: BLOOD STEM CELL DONATION

Zain,
donor

For patients with deadly diseases like blood cancer and sickle cell, there is a cure—a blood stem cell transplant from a genetically matched donor.

YOU could save someone's life.

MYTH: Donating is very painful.

FACT: Donating is less painful than you probably think.

- While TV shows and movies have wildly exaggerated blood stem cell donation—especially bone marrow donation—as something scary, the reality is much less dramatic.
- Discomfort during recovery varies from person to person. Side effects may include back pain, fatigue, headache or bruising for a few days or weeks.
- The vast majority of donors say it was worth it to help save a life, and they would do it again.

MYTH: Donating involves opening up or removing bones.

FACT: Most blood stem cell donors give PBSC—a process similar to platelet donation.

No bone is removed.

- **PBSC donation** is a nonsurgical procedure and the most common way to donate. For 5 days leading up to donation, you will be given injections of a drug called filgrastim to increase the number of cells in your bloodstream that are used for transplant. Some of your blood is then removed through a needle in one arm and passed through a machine that separates out the blood-forming cells. The remaining blood is returned to you through the other arm.
- **Bone marrow donation** is a surgical, usually outpatient procedure. You will receive anesthesia and feel no pain during the donation. Doctors use a needle to withdraw liquid marrow from the back of your pelvic bone.



“My friend in the fire department donated a few years ago, so it was really helpful to talk to him about it and learn how easy it was.”

-Akeem, donor (right) with LaShonda (left), his blood stem cell recipient

MYTH: Donating is dangerous.

FACT: There are few risks to donating.

- Protecting the safety of our donors and maintaining the public's trust is essential to saving lives.
- All donors are carefully prescreened to ensure they are healthy and the procedure is safe for them.
- There are rarely any long-term side effects from donating either PBSC or marrow. The donor's immune system stays strong, and their blood stem cells replenish themselves in 4 to 6 weeks.

MYTH: Donating takes a long time.

FACT: It doesn't take long to save someone's life.

- Online registration takes about 10 minutes. Completing and returning a cheek swab kit only takes a few minutes.
- If you're called to donate, the typical time commitment for the donation process is 20-30 hours spread out over a four-to-six-week period. This includes phone calls, appointments and the donation.

MYTH: Donating is expensive and you need medical insurance.

FACT: Donation is absolutely free to the donor.

- Be The Match covers travel, meals and hotel for donors and one companion.
- All medical costs for the donation procedure are covered by the patient's medical insurance or Be The Match.

MYTH: Sharing your personal information and DNA is risky.

FACT: We protect your privacy and confidentiality.

- Maintaining your trust is essential to saving lives. Your personal identifying information will not be shared with any companies or government agencies.
- We have rules in place to protect the rights and privacy of both donors and patients.
- Information about your genetic type and the stored sample from your cheek swab are identified by a code and stored separate from your personal identifying information.

MYTH: Asking about a donor's ethnic background is racist.

FACT: Ethnic background is an important factor for matching donors and patients.

- Patients are most likely to match someone of the same ethnic background. That's because genetic type is inherited.
- Adding more registry members who increase the ethnic diversity of the registry improves all patients' odds of finding a match. Searching patients especially need more donors who identify as:

- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian, including South Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- Multiracial
- Information about your genetic type and the stored sample from your cheek swab are identified by a code and stored separate from your personal identifying information.

MYTH: Gay men cannot join or donate.

FACT: Gay men and others in the LGBTQ+ community CAN join the registry and donate.

- Be The Match does not ask about members' sexual orientation.
- For medical reasons, transsexual and non-binary individuals are asked to provide their sex assigned at birth when they register. Pronouns and gender identity are respected throughout the process.

MYTH: Be The Match discriminates against people age 45+.

FACT: Age guidelines protect the safety of the donor and provide the best possible outcome for the patient. They are not meant to discriminate.

- Donors age 18-44 provide the greatest chance for transplant success.
- Doctors request donors in the 18-44 age group 86% of the time.

You could be someone's ONLY match—but you'll never know unless you join.



800-627-7692 | BeTheMatch.org

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Lauren,
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