

COMMON QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT JOINING THE AUSTRALIAN BONE MARROW DONOR REGISTRY (ABMDR)

What is the eligibility criteria to join?

- You need to be aged between 18 to 45 to join.
- The Red Cross Blood Service collect the blood samples on behalf of the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR), so each organisation has its own eligibility criteria. Please visit www.abmdr.org.au/eligibility-criteria and www.donateblood.com.au/eligibility

Note: If you are not eligible to donate blood but are eligible to join the ABMDR, then you may request for the nurse to take a small sample of blood to be sent to the ABMDR to join without a blood donation (at the discretion of staff).

How do I join?

- Call the Red Cross Blood Service on 13 14 95 to book an appointment and have a small sample of blood taken at your nearest collection centre or visit www.donateblood.com.au/make-appointment
- You need to specifically request to join the ABMDR when making your appointment.

I am already a blood donor, does this mean I am on the ABMDR?

- If you already donate blood, this does not mean that you are automatically added to the bone marrow registry. You need to specifically request to join the ABMDR and give a blood sample.

Does it cost me anything to join?

- There is no cost to join.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DONATING YOUR STEM CELLS

Will I be a match and asked to donate my stem cells?

- Only 1 in 1500 Australians are a match in any given year so you will not be receiving calls all the time that you are someone's match!

Does it hurt to donate my stem cells?

- It's not as scary as it sounds! These days your stem cells can usually be taken straight from the blood stream, much like in a blood donation.
- You will receive a small daily injection for 4 days prior to the stem cell collection day. It's safe and harmless and allows your stem cells to flow through your blood stream.
- On the stem cell collection day, the non-surgical procedure takes 3-4 hours and you can often watch TV or read a book during it and return to normal activities afterwards.

Are there any risks to my health?

- Your health is very important and your medical team will never put you through a procedure if they believe you are not healthy or fit enough. All the necessary checks are done before you donate your stem cells.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Does my blood type need to match with the patient's blood type?

- No your blood type does not need to match the patient's blood type. It is the other markers in the blood that are more important for matching, in some cases the patient will even have a new blood type (their donor's blood type) after transplant!

COMMON QUESTIONS

OTHER QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Why is there an age restriction?

- The eligibility criteria to join the ABMDR requires people to be aged between 18 to 45.
- Nobody likes to hear that they are “too old” in any circumstance! But in the case of stem cell donation, there is scientific evidence that younger stem cells perform better in a transplant which means a higher chance for a successful outcome for the patient.
- In addition to this, older donors are more likely to develop age-related conditions which may mean they cannot donate.

Why are male donors needed?

- Male donors are excellent candidates for stem cell donation. This is essentially due to biological reasons.
- Pregnancy in women create antibodies in their blood which can increase the likelihood of “graft vs host” disease for the patient receiving the stem cells. This can be a serious complication for the recipient where the donor cells attack the cells, organs and tissues of the patient after they receive the transplant.
- It's not that female donors are undesired candidates, but quite often males are chosen as ideal matches for patients!



WE ALL WANT TO HELP, WHY DON'T YOU ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO JOIN REGARDLESS OF ETHNICITY?

- We often get asked why we focus so heavily on the “ethnic diversity” message. Everyone wants to help which is amazing, in an ideal world we could just have anyone and everyone join! Our goal is to increase awareness on the cause amongst the entire public regardless of their cultural heritage, but we are aiming to target people with culturally diverse backgrounds to take action and join the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR).
- Other than the fact that a patient is more likely to find their stem cell match with someone who shares a similar ethnic or indigenous background to them, and we know that these groups are underrepresented on the ABMDR meaning these patients are often the ones who struggle to find their match, there are a couple other reasons why we heavily focus on diversifying the ABMDR.
- Did you know the science says that if we were to DOUBLE the number of people currently on the ABMDR as it is, it would only increase the chances of overall matching by 5%...and that's because it's heavily skewed to representing people with a North Caucasian background.
- Also with limited funding and a limited number of samples that can be collected each year, people joining who have a North Caucasian background essentially uses up funding to test a sample type that we already have plenty of and doesn't necessarily increase overall matching. So it becomes even more important to make sure the “right” type of samples are collected which are those with any story of ethnic or indigenous heritage.