

Answers to Common Concerns About Giving Plasma

It is normal to feel nervous before giving plasma, especially if it is your first time. Here are answers to common questions and concerns to help you stay informed and put you at ease.

Does it hurt?

Most people report that the initial needle prick feels like a bee sting, but that this feeling quickly goes away. Otherwise, giving plasma should be painless.

How will I feel after giving plasma?

People who give plasma sometimes experience initial lightheadedness after donating. This can usually be overcome by staying hydrated and eating a healthy meal. The day after you give plasma, you may also feel more fatigued than usual. It's important to rest and rehydrate after giving plasma to give your body a chance to replenish your own plasma.

What is a citrate reaction?

The machine that separates your plasma from the other blood components uses a substance called citrate to prevent clotting. Some citrate may enter your bloodstream when giving plasma. Most people experience no side effects from this. However, for a small number of people, citrate may lower calcium levels in the body temporarily and cause tingling in fingers or toes, chills, or other more serious side effects. To make sure you do not have any unexpected reactions, it is important to stay at the center after giving plasma for about 10–15 minutes.

Giving plasma takes too long.

Your first time giving plasma can take up to 2 hours, but visits after that are usually shorter. You can expect the paperwork and screening process to

take approximately half as long as the first time for future visits. You also do not need a physical exam each time you go—that is only required once per year.

My body needs all of its plasma. I can't give away such a large volume.

People typically give about 800 milliliters of plasma, which is a little less than four cups. Depending on your size, this represents about 10% of your total blood volume, which is well within safe limits. Healthy people can restore this amount in a matter of hours.

What if I experience a severe reaction?

It is extremely rare to experience a severe side effect from giving plasma. Side effects are typically limited to lightheadedness or bruising at the needle site. People giving plasma for the first time, younger adults, and people with low weights tend to experience these side effects more often than others. Plasma center staff are trained to recognize early signs of adverse reactions and can be sure you receive any necessary treatment—even if it's helping you put your feet up and drink an extra glass of water.

Are there long-term effects of giving plasma?

Several studies have shown that people who give plasma regularly for long periods of time do not experience any problems or side effects. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also has guidelines to limit how often you can give plasma to help keep you safe.

If you give plasma frequently, you may consider checking in with your health care provider so that they can help monitor certain blood component levels, such as iron and immunoglobulin.