

Phlebotomy Information for Patients with Hemochromatosis

What is a phlebotomy (pronounced: flee-bot-o-me)?

It's the same procedure as when you donate blood. A nurse takes about a pint of blood from a vein in your arm. The procedure takes about an hour. A phlebotomy is simple, safe, and effective.

How often must I have a phlebotomy?

For about a year or more, you will probably have phlebotomies once or twice a week. How many phlebotomies you have and how often you have them depends on how much iron has built up in your body and what your doctor recommends.

Must I have phlebotomies for the rest of my life?

Yes. But after the iron is first lowered to a safe amount, you will have phlebotomies less often, usually a few times a year.

Does a phlebotomy have side effects?

Most people feel just fine. Others feel tired afterward and like to rest for an hour or so. It's a good idea to drink water, milk, or fruit juices before AND after a phlebotomy.

Where can I get a phlebotomy?

Therapeutic phlebotomy can be made in many places; including hospitals, clinics, and bloodmobiles (mobile blood drives on specially equipped buses). People can also donate at community blood centers and hospital-based donor centers. Many people donate at blood drives at their work places. Verify that the blood donation center can withdraw blood for your phlebotomy treatments at the frequency prescribed by your doctor. If you need help finding a blood donation center, check with your doctor.

The donation process

The donor lies down or sits in a reclining chair. The skin covering the inner part of the elbow joint is cleansed. A new, sterile needle that is connected to plastic tubing and a blood bag is inserted into an arm vein. The donor is asked to squeeze his or her hand repeatedly to help blood flow from the vein into the blood bag. Typically, one unit of blood, roughly equivalent to a pint, is collected. Collected blood is sent to the laboratory for testing. The donor is escorted to an observation area for light refreshments and a brief rest period.

Before treatment

- Drink water, milk, or fruit juice; liquids such as these will help increase blood flow and therefore shorten the amount of time a phlebotomy will take.

After Your Treatment

- Drink water, milk, or fruit juices after treatment.
- Avoid vigorous physical activity for 24 hours after treatment.
- Continue phlebotomy treatments as needed.

Without phlebotomies, iron overload may cause illness and premature death. Treatment is worth the effort.



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