Information for Potential Bone Marrow Donors

Source: Adapted from BeTheMatch.org and www.deletebloodcancer.org

Thousands of patients with blood cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, sickle cell and other life-threatening diseases need a bone marrow, peripheral blood stem cell, or cord blood transplant to save their lives.

Seventy percent of all patients who need a transplant don’t have a matched donor in their family. However, a patient’s likelihood of finding a matching donor on the Be The Match Registry® is estimated from 66-97%, depending on race and ethnicity.

During a bone marrow, stem cell or cord blood transplant, a donor’s healthy blood-forming cells are given directly into the recipient’s bloodstream, where they can begin to function and multiply. For the recipient’s body to accept these healthy cells, the donor needs to be a close match. That’s where you can help.

Step 1: Confirm your eligibility to be a donor

Guidelines for Potential Donors

The Be The Match Registry® is the national bone marrow donor registry in the United States, operated by the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP). Below are the guidelines for becoming a registered donor.

- **Age:** Patients especially need donors who are between ages 18 and 44 years because donors in this age group produce more and higher-quality cells than older donors. Doctors request donors in the 18-44 age group in 90 percent of transplant cases. Anyone between the ages of 45 and 60 can still register to be a bone marrow donor, however, registration must be done online and there is a fee involved. There is no cost to register for those between the ages of 18 and 44. Age guidelines are not meant to discriminate, but are meant to protect the safety of the donor and provide the best possible outcome for the patient.

- **Medical Conditions & Weight Guidelines:** Many factors may make a person medically ineligible to join the Be The Match Registry®. Read more on BeTheMatch.org for guidelines about specific medical conditions and weight restrictions for donors.

- **Race and Ethnicity:** When it comes to finding a match between a donor and a patient, doctors look for a close match of human leukocyte antigen (HLA) types. HLA are proteins – or markers – that are used by our immune systems to recognize which cells belong in our bodies and which do not. Research has found that when matching HLA types, a person is more likely to find a match from the same racial or ethnic background. This is because the HLA markers used in matching patients and donors are inherited. Some combinations of these markers are more common in certain racial groups than others. A person’s best chance of finding a donor may be with someone who shares a similar ancestry. Read more on BeTheMatch.org.

If you don’t meet the medical or age guidelines above, there are still opportunities to help! Please consider making a tax-deductible monetary donation on Jason’s Be The Match® team page at http://www.bethematchfoundation.org/goto/Join4Jason.
Step 2: Make an informed decision

Take the time to learn about joining the Be The Match® registry and becoming a potential donor before you register.

Types of Donation Procedures: There are two ways that an adult can donate and help a recipient get a second chance at life: bone marrow donation (done in about 25% of cases) and peripheral blood stem cell donation (done in about 75% of cases). The patient's doctor will select the method that promises the best outcome for the patient. As a potential donor, it’s important to understand both procedures and be comfortable moving forward with either one.

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<th>Bone marrow donation cells collected from the pelvic bone – surgical procedure</th>
<th>Peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation – non-surgical</th>
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When a patient with leukemia, lymphoma or other life-threatening diseases needs a transplant, cord blood may also be an option. Umbilical cord blood, which is typically discarded, is rich with the blood-forming cells that can give blood cancer patients hope for a cure. Donating your newborn’s cord blood to a public cord blood bank, at no cost to you, can help patients get the transplants they need.

Here are some resources from BeTheMatch.org to help you learn more:

- Donating peripheral blood stem cells
- Donating bone marrow
- Donating cord blood
- How bone marrow donors are selected
- Donation process
- Timeline of a transplant
- FAQs about joining the Be The Match® registry and becoming a donor
- Myths and Facts about bone marrow donation

Step 3: Make a committed decision

Even though registering to become a marrow donor is an easy process, it’s important to think seriously about becoming a potential donor before joining the registry. Once you join the registry, patients are counting on your commitment. By joining the registry, you are saying you’re willing to donate to any patient in need. Read more about the commitment to patients on BeTheMatch.org
Step 4: Register and get a cheek swab when you attend a local marrow registry drive

When you join the Be The Match Registry®, you will fill out an application form with your personal information and have a quick cheek swab. During the swab test, a cotton swab is used to collect some cells from your cheek. No blood samples are needed for this test. The cheek swab is sent to a lab to identify your tissue type. This information is used to match your tissue type to that of a potential recipient. After the swab test, it generally takes about two months to process your tissue type and add your name to the registry. Once your name has been added, you will receive a card in the mail confirming you are a member of the registry.

Step 5: Wait. You’ll be contacted if you’re a match!

Please understand that not everyone who registers will be a match for a patient – about 1 in 540 registrants go on to donate bone marrow or peripheral blood stem cells to a patient. You don't actually become a donor until you have been identified as a potential match. You will be contacted if you are a possible match for a patient. Health screenings and additional tests may be required to verify your eligibility. Throughout the process you will receive education to make sure you are making an informed decision and that you fully understand and consent to becoming a donor.

All medical expenses related to additional testing and donation will be covered by the patient’s insurance or by Be The Match®.

Learn more on BeTheMatch.org