Steps of Marrow and Blood Cell Donation

1 Join the Registry. Volunteers must be between the ages of 18 – 60 and meet the health guidelines. Volunteers should be committed to helping any patient. To join, you complete a short health questionnaire and sign a form stating that you understand what it means to be listed on the Registry. Then, a small blood sample or swab of cheek cells is taken to find your tissue type. This information is added to the Registry.

2 Stay committed and available. Doctors search the Registry to find a donor whose tissue type matches their patient's. If you are chosen, your donor center will contact you. If you agree, more testing will be scheduled.

3 Attend an information session. You will meet with staff from your donor center to learn about the donation process, risks and side effects. You are free to bring a friend or family member. You will also be told which source of blood-forming cells is being requested — either collected from the marrow or from the circulating blood (known as a PBSC donation). You will then decide whether or not to donate.

4 Receive a physical exam. If you agree to donate, you will be given a physical exam to discover if donating would pose any special risks to you or the patient.

Marrow Donation

5 Marrow donation is a surgical procedure. While you receive anesthesia, doctors use special, hollow needles to withdraw liquid marrow from the back of your pelvic bones. Many donors receive a transfusion of their own previously donated blood.

6 Side effects and recovery. You can expect to feel some soreness in your lower back for a few days or longer. Most donors are back to their normal routine in a few days. Your marrow is completely replaced within four to six weeks.

7 Follow-up. Your NMDP donor center coordinator will follow up with you until you are able to resume normal activity. You will also receive annual calls for long-term follow-up.

PBSC Donation

5 PBSC donation takes place at an apheresis center. To increase the number of blood-forming cells in the bloodstream, donors receive daily injections of a drug called filgrastim for five days before the collection. Your blood is then removed through a sterile 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.

6 Side effects and recovery. You may experience headache, or bone or muscle aches for several days before collection. This is a side effect of the filgrastim injections that you received to increase the number of blood-forming cells in the bloodstream. These effects disappear shortly after the collection.

7 Follow-up. Your NMDP donor center coordinator will follow up with you until you are able to resume normal activity. You will also receive annual calls for long-term follow-up.

The National Marrow Donor Program helps people who need a life-saving marrow or blood cell transplant. We connect patients, doctors, donors and researchers to the resources they need to help more people live longer and healthier lives.

For more information call 1 (800) MARROW-2

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