

## MYTHS VS. FACTS: BLOOD STEM CELL DONATION

Zain,  
blood stem  
cell donor

For patients with deadly diseases like blood cancer and sickle cell, there is a cure—a blood stem cell transplant from a genetically matched donor.

**YOU** could save someone's life.

**MYTH:** Donating is very painful.

**FACT:** Donating is less painful than you probably think.

- While TV shows and movies have wildly exaggerated blood stem cell donation—especially bone marrow donation—as something scary, the reality is much less dramatic.
- Discomfort during recovery varies from person to person. Side effects may include back pain, fatigue, headache or bruising for a few days or weeks.
- The vast majority of donors say it was worth it to help save a life, and they would do it again.

**MYTH:** Donating involves opening up or removing bones.

**FACT:** Most blood stem cell donors give PBSC—a process similar to platelet donation. No bone is removed.

- **PBSC donation** is a nonsurgical procedure and the most common way to donate. For 5 days leading up to donation, you will be given injections of a drug called filgrastim to increase the number of cells in your bloodstream that are used for transplant. Some of your blood is then removed through a 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.
- **Bone marrow donation** is a surgical, usually outpatient procedure. You will receive anesthesia and feel no pain during the donation. Doctors use a needle to withdraw liquid marrow from the back of your pelvic bone.



*“My friend in the fire department donated a few years ago, so it was really helpful to talk to him about it and learn how easy it was.”*

-Akeem, donor (right) with LaShonda (left), his blood stem cell recipient

**MYTH: Donating is dangerous.**

**FACT: There are few risks to donating.**

- Protecting the safety of our donors and maintaining the public’s trust is essential to saving lives.
- All donors are carefully prescreened to ensure they are healthy and the procedure is safe for them.
- There are rarely any long-term side effects from donating either PBSC or marrow. The donor’s immune system stays strong, and their blood stem cells replenish themselves in 4 to 6 weeks.

**MYTH: Donating takes a long time.**

**FACT: It doesn’t take long to save someone’s life.**

- Online registration takes about 10 minutes. Completing and returning a cheek swab kit only takes a few minutes.
- If you’re called to donate, the typical time commitment for the donation process is 20–30 hours spread out over a four-to-six-week period. This includes phone calls, appointments and the donation.

**MYTH: Donating is expensive and you need medical insurance.**

**FACT: Donation is absolutely free to the donor.**

- Be The Match covers travel, meals and hotel for donors and one companion.
- All medical costs for the donation procedure are covered by the patient’s medical insurance or Be The Match.

**MYTH: Sharing your personal information and DNA is risky.**

**FACT: We protect your privacy and confidentiality.**

- Maintaining your trust is essential to saving lives. Your personal identifying information will not be shared with any companies or government agencies.
- We have rules in place to protect the rights and privacy of both donors and patients.
- Information about your genetic type and the stored sample from your cheek swab are identified by a code and stored separate from your personal identifying information.

**MYTH: Asking about a donor’s ethnic background is racist.**

**FACT: Ethnic background is an important factor for matching donors and patients.**

- Patients are most likely to match someone of the same ethnic background. That’s because genetic type is inherited.
- Adding more registry members who increase the ethnic diversity of the registry improves all patients’ odds of finding a match. Searching patients especially need more donors who identify as:
- Black or African American

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian, including South Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- Multiracial
- Information about your genetic type and the stored sample from your cheek swab are identified by a code and stored separate from your personal identifying information.

**MYTH:** Gay men cannot join or donate.

**FACT:** Gay men and others in the LGBTQ+ community CAN join the registry and donate.

- Be The Match does not ask about members' sexual orientation.
- For medical reasons, transsexual and non-binary individuals are asked to provide their sex assigned at birth when they register. Pronouns and gender identity are respected throughout the process.

**MYTH:** Be The Match discriminates against people age 40+.

**FACT:** Age guidelines protect the safety of the donor and provide the best possible outcome for the patient. They are not meant to discriminate.

- Donors age 18-40 provide the greatest chance for transplant success.
- Doctors request donors in the 18-35 age group 75% of the time.

**You could be someone's  
ONLY match—but you'll  
never know unless you join.**



800-627-7692 | BeTheMatch.org

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**Lauren,**  
blood stem  
cell donor