

Myths and Facts about Marrow Donation

MYTH: Marrow donation is painful.

FACT: General or regional anesthesia is always used for this procedure. Donors feel no needle injections and no pain during the marrow donation process. Afterward, most donors feel some pain in the lower back for a few days or longer.

MYTH: All marrow donations involve surgery.

FACT: There are two ways to donate. The majority of donations do not involve surgery. The patient's doctor most commonly requests a peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation, which is non-surgical and outpatient. If the patient's doctor requests marrow, marrow donation is a surgical procedure, usually outpatient.

MYTH: Pieces of bone are removed from the donor.

FACT: Pieces of bone are not removed from the donor. In marrow donation, only the liquid marrow found inside the bones is collected. In a PBSC donation, cells are collected from the bloodstream in a process similar to donating plasma.

MYTH: Donating marrow is dangerous and weakens the donor.

FACT: Though no medical procedure is without risk, there are rarely any long-term effects from donating. Only five percent or less of a donor's marrow is needed to save a life. After donation, the body replaces the donated marrow within four to six weeks. The National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), which operates the Be The Match RegistrySM, screens all donors carefully before they donate to ensure they are healthy and the procedure is safe for them. The NMDP also educates donors, answers questions every step of the way, and follows up with donors after donation.

MYTH: Marrow donation involves a lengthy recovery process.

FACT: PBSC donors take the drug filgrastim for five days leading up to donation and may have symptoms such as headache, bone or muscle pain, nausea, insomnia or fatigue during this time. These symptoms nearly always disappear one or two days after donating, and the donor is back to normal. Marrow donors can expect to feel fatigue, some soreness or pressure in their lower back and perhaps some discomfort walking. Marrow donors can expect to be back to work, school and other activities within one to seven days. The average time for all symptoms to disappear is 21 days.

MYTH: Donors have to pay for the donation procedure.

FACT: Donors never pay for donating and are never paid to donate. All medical costs are paid by the patient's medical insurance or by the patient, sometimes with assistance from the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP). The NMDP, which operates the Be The Match Registry, reimburses donors for travel costs, and may reimburse other costs on a case-by-case basis. Although a donor never pays to donate, many people do pay the tissue-typing cost when they join the registry.