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TIME

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Giving someone hope – the importance of a bone marrow/stem cell transplant

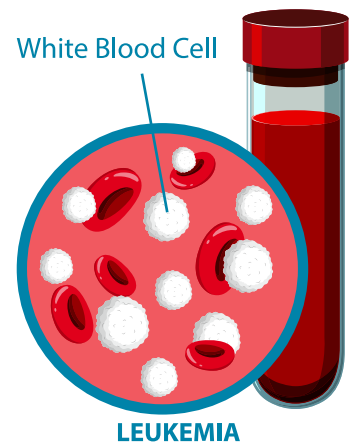
Heady bone marrow releases blood cells into the bloodstream when they are mature and when required. Without bone marrow, our bodies cannot produce the white cells we need to fight infection, the red blood cells we need to carry oxygen, and the platelets we need to stop bleeding.

The sad truth is that some of us aren't even aware that leukaemia, other blood diseases and immune disorders reach a point where the only possible cure, and a chance for survival, is a bone marrow transplant. Bone marrow makes billions of new blood cells every day and most of them are red cells.

Leukaemia is a blood cancer caused by a rise in the number of white blood cells in our bodies. Those white blood cells eliminate the red blood cells and platelets which the body needs to be healthy. The extra white blood cells do not function properly and leukaemia cells cannot fight infection the way normal, healthy white blood cells do, so they start to affect the way organs work as there are just too many of these unhealthy cells in the body.

Bone marrow remains red until around the age of 7 years, as the need for new continuous blood formation is high. As the body ages, it gradually replaces the red bone marrow with yellow fat tissue.

Adults have an average of about 2.6 kilograms of bone marrow, about half of which is red.



Bone marrow is the tissue in the body where blood cells are produced. A transplant replaces the diseased bone marrow with healthy bone marrow stem cells, so that the body can start producing healthy blood again.

No one knows exactly what causes leukaemia, but some of the risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Radiation or chemotherapy
- Family history
- Genetic disorder

Leukaemia can be classified into two groups, determined by how fast it develops and what type of cell is involved.

Classification

1. How fast it develops, includes:

Acute leukaemia - This is when most of the abnormal blood cells do not mature, cannot carry out normal functions and it can progress very fast.

Chronic leukaemia - Happens when there are some immature cells, but others are normal and can work the way they should. It advances at a slower rate than acute Leukaemia.

2. What type of cell is involved, includes:

Lymphocytic leukaemia - involves bone marrow cells that become lymphocytes, a kind of white blood cell.

Myelogenous leukaemia - involves the marrow cells that create red blood cells, platelets, and other kinds of white blood cells.



Leukaemia is divided into four types:

1

Acute lymphocytic leukaemia is the most common form of childhood leukaemia and can spread to lymph nodes and the central nervous system.

2

Acute myelogenous leukaemia is the second most common form of childhood leukaemia and one of the most common forms for adults.

3

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is another of the most common forms of adult leukaemia. Some kinds will be stable for years and won't need treatment, but if your body isn't able to create normal blood cells with others, you'll need treatment.

4

Chronic myelogenous leukaemia. With this form, you might not have noticeable symptoms. You might not be diagnosed with it until you have a routine blood test and people aged 65 and older have a higher risk of this type.

The treatment you get depends on the type of leukaemia you have, how far it's spread, and how healthy you are. The main options are:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemotherapy• Radiation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biologic therapy• Targeted therapy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bone marrow/Stem cell transplant• Surgery |
|--|---|--|



The South African Bone Marrow Registry (SABMR) calls on all possible donors to help save lives. The SABMR was founded in Cape Town in 1991 and is an accredited member of the World Marrow Donor Association.

Not everybody is blessed enough to have a compatible donor in their family and might have to rely on a stranger who has an exact type of bone marrow tissue that can be donated. It sounds easier than it actually is. According to the SABMR, finding a match is a 1/100 000 chance because of the thousands of tissue types and some patients may have inherited such unique tissue types that there could be an even slimmer chance of finding a match. Finding suitable donors is therefore always an issue and so donors are always in demand.

If you're between the ages of 16 and 45, you're eligible to register as a bone marrow donor and can help save lives and give hope to those in dire need. Registration is done in just a few minutes through an online platform.

Register today if you would like to help the SABMR in their cause.



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