

Frequently Asked Questions

About Registration

Q: I registered a few years ago, do I need to register again?

A: If you signed up as a bone marrow donor before, then you do not need to sign-up again. If you are not certain whether you registered in the past, you must contact the donor center you think you may have registered with. Please do not register with DKMS until you have confirmed that you are not already registered. This would be a waste of resources and it would appear to a patient that there are more potential matches than in actuality.

Q: Why does a person have to be 18 to join? Can't my parent sign the consent for me?

A: An individual must be 18 because marrow donation is a surgical procedure and the donor must legally be able to give informed consent. A guardian or parent cannot sign a release or give consent because unrelated marrow donation is a voluntary procedure and is not beneficial or life-saving to the donor. Please remember you can register as soon as you turn 18!

Q: If I'm over 55, why can't I join?

A: The age limit is not meant to discriminate. We must use chronological age to determine eligibility to protect the safety of the donor and provide the best possible treatment for the patient. With age comes a small increase in the risk of side effects from anesthesia.

Q: Can I get tested for a specific patient or family member?

A: When you sign up as a bone marrow donor with DKMS, you make a commitment to consider donating to any searching patient who matches you. If you want to be tested only for a specific patient, you will need to have your testing done privately. You can request a private test kit at bonemarrowtest.com.

Q: If I have already been tested for a family member, can I send my results to DKMS?

A: Yes, contact DKMS for a registration form which you will send back with a copy of your HLA tissue typing lab report. Once you are listed with DKMS, we will contact you if you are identified as a possible match for a patient.

Q: Can I register if I am pregnant?

A: You can still register to be a bone marrow donor, however you cannot donate during your pregnancy. We will temporarily block you until at least 6 months after you give birth. After that time, you will be re-activated and can be matched with anyone until your 61st birthday.

Q: Do I have to be a citizen and/or a resident of the U.S.?

A: You do not have to be a citizen of the U.S. to register as a bone marrow donor. However, you must currently reside in the U.S. because transplants can only be facilitated in the country of the donor center, in this case the U.S. If you reside outside of the U.S. you can find a donor center in your home country at bmdw.org.

Q: Can a gay male register as a bone marrow donor?

A: As DKMS is a donor center which is a member organization of the Be The Match Registry® (operated by the NMDP) we are bound by the rules and regulations set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. At this time, those NMDP regulations exclude men who have sex with other men from registering as bone marrow donors.

About Donation

Q: What is a bone marrow transplant?

A: A bone marrow transplant is a life-saving treatment for people with leukemia, lymphoma and many other blood diseases. First, patients undergo chemotherapy and sometimes radiation to destroy their diseased marrow. Then a donor's healthy blood-forming cells are given directly into the patient's bloodstream, where they can begin to function and multiply. For a patient's body to accept these healthy cells, the patient needs a donor who is a close match.

Q: Does it hurt?

A: For the [peripheral blood stem cell donation](#) most people will feel bone pain from the injections they take for 4 days before the donation. Many people will also have muscle aches or headaches at some point while taking the injections. It might feel like you are starting to catch the flu. After you donate, you will probably also feel very tired. These symptoms should go away within one to two days.

During the [bone marrow extraction](#) you are under anesthesia. Afterward the procedure, donors generally feel discomfort and some pain in their lower back for one or two weeks.

We check on our donors after the donation to make sure you are recovering properly. If you're not, we'll arrange and pay for any follow up care.

Q: Do I have a choice on which donation method?

A: When you are found to be a match, the patient's doctor looks at all the information and decides which method is the best. There are a lot of factors that can make one method better than another

depending on the patient's situation. Because of that, we ask our donors to be comfortable with both methods of donation.

Q: Can I change my mind about donating?

A: Donating is voluntary and you have the right to change your mind about being a donor at any time. If you decide you no longer want to be listed as a registered bone marrow donor, it is critical to let DKMS know immediately. A late decision not to donate can be life-threatening to a patient, so please think seriously before registering.

Q: How long does donating take?

A: Being a bone marrow donor does require a time commitment. On average the entire process – from the first information session to the actual donation – can take 40 to 46 hours over four to eight weeks.

Q: Do I have to travel?

A: We always try to schedule our donors at the collection center closest to their home. In cases where getting to the collection center involves traveling, DKMS will arrange your transportation and pay these expenses. After the collection a courier takes the donation sample and delivers it to wherever the patient is located.

About Payment

Q: Who pays for the donation process?

A: The costs for the donation procedure – whether they are medical, travel or miscellaneous expenses – are covered by the patient's medical insurance, DKMS and the Be The Match Registry® (operated by the NMDP).

Q: Will I get paid for the time off I may need to take from work?

A: If you are not covered by your employer and make under \$24/hr, DKMS has a financial assistance program that deals with lost wage compensation. If you are found to be a match for a patient we can give you more information on the program to help you.

About Matching

Q: How are patients matched with donors?

A: A cheek cell sample is collected at registration. The sample is tested for the HLA tissue type and added to the Be The Match Registry® (operated by the NMDP), so doctors can search and find a matching donor for their patient.

Q: What happens if I match a patient?

A: If you are found to be a match for a patient, more testing will need to be done to determine if you are the best suitable match including collecting blood samples and a physical exam. A DKMS representative will walk you through each step of the process and will be available to answer any questions you may have.

Q: What is human leukocyte antigen (HLA) typing?

A: Human leukocyte antigen (HLA) typing is a DNA based tissue test used to match patients and donors for bone marrow transplants. HLA are proteins — or markers — found on most cells in your body. Your immune system uses these markers to recognize which cells belong in your body and which do not. A close match between your HLA markers and your donor's can reduce the risk that your immune cells will reject your donor's cells or that your donor's immune cells will reject your body after the transplant.

Q: How likely is it that I will match a patient?

A: We cannot predict the likelihood as there is too much diversity in tissue types. There is a chance you may never be identified as a match for someone needing a transplant – or you may be the one match to save someone's life.

Q: Does ethnicity affect matching?

A: Your ethnic heritage is an important factor as patients are more likely to match with someone of a similar background. Increasing the diversity of the donor pool increases the likelihood that all patients will find a life-saving match.

Q: Will I get patient updates or meet my transplant recipient?

A: All patient information is confidential. However you may be told the patient's age, gender and disease. After the donation your recipient's center may provide up to three updates within the first year after the transplant – after one month, six months and one year. Some transplant centers do not provide updates at all. The donor and patient can usually communicate or meet more than a year after the donation if both parties are interested and willing.