For us, cancer is personal

Therapeutic Plasma Exchange
What is plasma?
Plasma is part of your blood. It is mainly made up of water, minerals and proteins. When plasma is separated from the blood, it is yellow in colour.

What is a therapeutic plasma exchange?
Stated simply, a therapeutic plasma exchange involves the ‘old plasma’ being removed and replaced with ‘new plasma’.

Why do I need a therapeutic plasma exchange?
Some diseases create substances (autoantibodies) or excess proteins which are contained in the plasma. These substances circulate throughout the body and may attack healthy cells and tissue. Your doctor will decide if it is necessary to perform a therapeutic plasma exchange. During a therapeutic plasma exchange, large quantities of these autoantibodies and proteins will be removed.

How often will I need a therapeutic plasma exchange?
The number of therapeutic plasma exchange procedures required is dependent upon the disease being treated and the response to treatment. Your doctor will discuss the number and frequency of therapeutic plasma exchange procedures with you.

How is a therapeutic plasma exchange performed?
A registered nurse will perform the therapeutic plasma exchange. You will be connected to a device called a blood cell separator or apheresis machine. The blood cell separator uses sterile tubing, which is used only once. The registered nurse will stay with you throughout the therapeutic plasma exchange procedure.

You may feel tired or lethargic after the procedure.

We ask that you organise a relative or friend to drive you home afterwards.

The nurse will insert a drip into each of your arms. Blood is drawn from one arm into the machine. The machine separates the plasma from the rest of your blood. The plasma is collected by the machine and discarded by the nurse at the end of the procedure.

A replacement fluid (‘new plasma’) and the rest of your blood are returned to you via the drip in your other arm. During the procedure, the machine is continuously drawing, separating and returning your blood. The nurse ensures that the volume of plasma removed by the machine is not greater than the volume of replacement fluid given.

Blood products called albumin and fresh frozen plasma are routinely used as replacement fluid during therapeutic plasma exchange.

Please ask your doctor or nurse for more information on the replacement fluid that you will receive during your procedure.

Therapeutic plasma exchange and medication
Please inform your doctor and nurse of all medication that you are taking. Some medications can effect or be effected by plasma exchange.

What if my veins are not good enough for therapeutic plasma exchange?
Sometimes it is not possible to obtain adequate blood flow from the veins in the arms. In this instance other options for gaining access to your blood are available. If needed, your nurse and doctor will discuss these options with you.

This pamphlet has been prepared to explain therapeutic plasma exchange. If you have any questions please ask your doctor or nurse.
How long will the therapeutic plasma exchange take?

A therapeutic plasma exchange takes two (2) to three (3) hours to complete. It is important to wear comfortable clothing. You should eat and drink as normal before, during and after your therapeutic plasma exchange. You may wish to read a book, watch TV or a DVD throughout the procedure. Visitors are welcome, but should be limited to one or two people.

Is therapeutic plasma exchange painful?

Having a therapeutic plasma exchange does not hurt. The insertion of the drips may cause some initial discomfort. This discomfort usually passes after a few minutes. It is important to remember that the drips in your arms remain in place throughout the procedure and your range of movement will be restricted.

Are there any side effects or problems that could occur?

Your doctor is responsible for the procedure and you will be seen by a doctor on the day of your therapeutic plasma exchange. A registered nurse will monitor you throughout the procedure and will assist you if you experience any difficulties.

Possible side effects include the following:

- Although only a small portion of your blood is in the machine at any time, the changes in blood volume may lead to a feeling of lightheadedness or dizziness. You should report these changes immediately to your nurse. During the procedure, your nurse will monitor your pulse and blood pressure and adjust the machine settings as necessary.
- Your blood naturally wants to clot when it leaves the body (e.g. a scab forms when you cut yourself). An anti-clotting medication (anticoagulant) is used to prevent clots forming while your blood is in the machine. The anticoagulant may cause a tingling sensation around your lips and or eyes. Again, please inform your nurse immediately if you experience these side effects. These symptoms only occur while you are attached to the machine and are generally easily resolved.
- You may feel tired during and for a few days following a therapeutic plasma exchange.
- There is a very small risk of disease transmission if fresh frozen plasma or albumin is used as the replacement fluid. All blood products are tested at the time of collection by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service.

How will I feel after a therapeutic plasma exchange?

You may feel tired or lethargic after the procedure. We ask that you organise a relative or friend to drive you home afterwards. It is unlikely you will experience any problems following the procedure. However, if you feel unwell or experience any side effects you should contact your doctor or the centre immediately.

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It is mainly made up of water, minerals and proteins.

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Icon Cancer Care locations

**Adelaide**
First Floor, Tennyson Centre
520 South Road
Kurralta Park SA 5037
P 08 8292 2333 | F 08 8292 2287

**South Brisbane**
Level 5, Mater Medical Centre
293 Vulture Street
South Brisbane QLD 4101
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4701

**Townsville**
9–13 Bayswater Road
Hyde Park QLD 4812
P 07 4795 7100 | F 07 4795 7101

**Chermside**
Level 1, Chermside Medical Complex
956 Gympie Road, Chermside QLD 4032
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4801

**Southport**
Level 9, Premion Place, 39 White Street (Corner Queen and High Streets)
Southport QLD 4215
P 07 5657 6400 | F 07 5657 6401

**Wesley**
Level 1, Wesley Medical Centre
40 Chasely Street
Auchenflower QLD 4066
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4601

This information was current at the time it was published and is intended as a guide only. It is not intended to replace information provided by your doctor or nurses. Each patient is an individual and responses may vary. If you have any questions, please talk to your doctor or clinic nurse.