

Apheresis - 2/20/04

I went and gave blood last night, but the experience was a little different than what I was used to. Which was in itself a little odd – I've given blood 19 times and was pretty much an old hat at the process.

This time they asked if I would be an apheresis donor. At first I thought they were talking about quad-bag they used last time – splits the donation into 4 smaller bags that can be used for infants.

Instead, they use a machine to draw the blood, take the stuff they need out of it, and put back the rest. In this case, they wanted the red blood cells and would put back the plasma along with some saline. They said the process would take longer and would end up taking the equivalent of two pints worth of red blood cells, but only a small decrease in overall blood volume.

I've got O- and I know how much people need that type, so I signed the waiver and settled in.

The needle still hurt a little bit, though they said it was smaller than the usual ones.

Once it was in place, the machine started to auto-pump the blood pressure cuff to get things going. The donation started and the blood went into the machine where a centrifuge separated it out. The plasma went into a bag on the outside of the machine – looked a lot like beer. After a bit, the red blood cells went into another bag and the guy said that the plasma and some saline would be returned through the same needle. He warned me it would be cold, but I had no idea.

Weird sensation – the plasma had started to cool toward room temp and the saline was already at room temp. Dump that directly into my 98.6 degree body and it felt really cold. I shivered a little bit and the guy offered a blanket, but I declined.

Once the plasma and saline was in me – the donation started again and the process repeated. The guy had me squeeze the little rubber ball more frequently and that sped things up a bit. Plasma returned - cold again. But that wasn't as bad since I was ready for it.

From there, it was pretty standard. Needle removed – “Raise your arm and apply direct pressure, etc. etc.”

I made my way over to the canteen area – and I was little disappointed. After I give blood, I want two things. Sugar and fluid. Usually this involves cookies and juice. Well, I got a tiny glass of juice and a couple of cookies before the attendant took off. Pretty much all that was left was coffee and vegetable trays. Not gonna do me any good. So I finished my snack in .2 nano seconds and headed out – returning briefly to get my card updated.

This puts me at 21 donations, since this one counted as 2. I have to wait longer to give again, but considering the blood emergency they are under, better to give now when they need it.

Overall, a good experience – even kinda fun, since the guy and I were cracking jokes the whole time. If they offer it, I’ll do this again the next time I’m eligible to give.

More info can be found at the Red Cross site:

<http://www.givelife2.org/donor/>