Can I have more than one transfusion?
Some people may need multiple transfusions during their illness.

Platelet transfusions
Although the great majority of transfusions are done to correct anaemia, occasionally transfusions of platelets may be given.

Platelets help clot the blood and prevent bleeding. If the number of platelets is low you may bruise easily and bleed heavily from even minor cuts or bruises.

People most commonly affected by low platelet counts include those -
- With leukaemia
- Who have had high dose of chemotherapy
- Who have received a bone marrow transplant

Normally one to three units of platelets are given at a time, over a shorter time than blood (each unit takes about 30 minutes).

Further information please contact:
St Benedict’s Hospice
Monkwearmouth Hospital
Newcastle Road, Sunderland. SR5 1NB
Telephone: (0191) 569 9195
www.hospice.co.uk

NHS South of Tyne and Wear (serving Gateshead Primary Care Trust, South Tyneside Primary Care Trust and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust) is committed to raising the standard of written information for patients, their carers, people who use the NHS and the general public.

This information can be made available in another format or language on request. If you require further copies of this leaflet please contact St Benedict’s Hospice Tel: (0191) 569 9192
This information leaflet has been prepared to help you understand more about blood transfusion.

We hope it will answer any questions you might have about your condition and the proposed treatment.

If you are unsure or concerned about anything, please ask the nurse or your doctor.

**What is anaemia?**

At some time during their illness, many people with cancer develop a lowering in the amount of red blood cells. This is called anaemia. It can be due to the cancer or its treatment, including chemotherapy and radiotherapy. If the level of red blood cells in your blood is low you may become very tired. This is because the oxygen being carried around your body by haemoglobin in your red blood cells is decreased. You may also become breathless.

If you have symptoms of anaemia or are having treatment for cancer you will have a blood test to check your haemoglobin level. This is known as a full blood count (FBC).

If your haemoglobin is low, a blood transfusion may then be offered. The extra red cells in the blood transfusion will pick up the oxygen from your lungs and transport it around the body to other tissues and organs. You may feel more energetic and the breathlessness may be eased. Many people worry about getting an infection from a blood transfusion. All blood is carefully screened before use, and infections are extremely rare.

If you require any further information, please ask a member of staff.

**Why are blood transfusions given?**

Anaemia is treated in different ways, depending on what is causing it. Blood transfusions offer an effective way of correcting anaemia.

Often, symptoms are quickly relieved and you should feel some benefit within 24 hours of having a transfusion.

**What will happen when I have a blood transfusion?**

Before a blood transfusion is given, blood must be cross-matched to make sure it is compatible.

After taking a sample of your blood to identify your blood group, it is matched with suitable donor blood.

To give the transfusion a small needle (cannula) is put into a vein in your hand or arm. This is then connected to a ‘drip’, allowing the blood to flow slowly into your arm.

**Will there be any side-effects?**

During transfusion, a nurse will regularly check your temperature, pulse and blood pressure for any reaction to the new blood. Because of cross-matching, severe side-effects from blood transfusions are now rare.

Common side-effects that can occur are:
- Headaches
- A slight rise in temperature
- A skin rash

These symptoms are relieved by drugs such as paracetamol and antihistamines.

The likelihood of getting an infection from a blood transfusion is very low please ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions.