

What your blood type means



If you thought blood was just blood, you'd be mistaken. There are different properties within the blood cells of different people that are the reason you may have A, B, AB, or O-type blood.

Blood basics

Each person has one of the four main blood types: A, B, AB, and O. Whichever type you are, it means you have that specific compound attached to your blood cells, which is called an antigen. Type A has A antigens, B has B antigens, AB has both A and B antigens, and O type has no antigens.

Within your circulatory system, you also have the opposite antibodies to these different antigens. In blood group A you'll have B antibodies, group B has A antibodies, group AB no antibodies, and group O has both A and B antibodies.

This is important when it comes to blood donations and transfusions. It's the reason you can't simply transfuse blood into someone who needs it without knowing their blood type.

If you, for example, receive A type blood and you're in the B group, your antibodies will react with the A antigens and cause a reaction. Your blood will begin to clot and this can leave you at risk for stroke, heart attack, or several other serious health issues that can be debilitating or even fatal. There are, however, two blood groups that don't necessarily fit these criteria.

Universal donors and recipients

People with O-type blood are referred to as universal donors. Because their blood doesn't carry antigens associated with other blood groups, there won't be a reaction between the antibodies in the recipient's blood.

It's why people with this blood type are encouraged to donate blood regularly as it makes matching the donor and recipient that much easier.

Those with the AB blood type are known as the universal recipients. Because their circulatory system doesn't contain A or B antibodies, the donor blood antigens can't react and they can receive blood across all blood groups.

While there are many more factors that come into play during transfusions, blood groups are a starting point for matching a donor and recipient.

If you don't know your blood group, June is the perfect time to visit your local blood donation centre as part of World Blood Donor Month.

Find out what your blood type is and at the same time donate a pint to save a life.