You may want to have a say in this decision, or you may simply want to follow your doctor's recommendation. Either way, this information will help you understand what your choices are so that you can talk to your doctor about them.

**Pregnancy: Should I Bank My Baby's Umbilical Cord Blood?**

Here's a record of your answers. You can use it to talk with your doctor or loved ones about your decision.

1. Get the facts
2. Compare your options
3. What matters most to you?
4. Where are you leaning now?
5. What else do you need to make your decision?

1. Get the Facts

**Your options**

- Have your baby's cord blood collected and sent to a private cord blood bank or a public cord blood bank.
- Do not bank or donate your baby's cord blood.

**Key points to remember**

- Doctors do not recommend that you bank cord blood on the slight chance that your baby will need stem cells someday. If your baby were to need stem cells, he or she would probably need stem cells from someone else rather than his or her own stem cells.
- Although privately banked cord blood is not likely to help your baby, it may help a sibling who has an illness that could be treated with a stem cell transplant. These include leukemia, sickle cell disease, Hodgkin's lymphoma, and thalassemia. Doctors recommend that you bank your baby's cord blood only if a family member already has one of these illnesses.
- You might consider donating the cord blood to a public bank instead. You probably won't be able to use the blood, but it could be used for research or for another child.
- Private cord blood banking is expensive. You will pay a starting fee of about $1,000 to $2,000, plus a storage fee of more than $100 a year for as long as the blood is stored.
- If you want to save the cord blood, you must arrange for it ahead of time. It is not a decision you can make at the last minute.
FAQs

What is umbilical cord blood?

Cord blood is the blood left in the umbilical cord after birth. It contains stem cells. These cells have the amazing ability to grow into many different kinds of cells, like bone marrow cells, blood cells, or brain cells. This can make them valuable for treating some diseases.

Diseases that can be treated with stem cell transplants include leukemia, Hodgkin’s disease, and some types of anemia. When healthy stem cells are transplanted into a child who is ill, those cells can grow new bone marrow cells to replace the ones destroyed by the disease or its treatment. Stem cells from the child’s own cord blood often cannot be used, because they may have led to the disease in the first place.

Much research is being done to see if stem cells can be used to treat more problems. For now, though, treatment is limited to diseases that affect blood cells.

Cord blood kept in a private bank is usually used to treat disease in a brother or sister. Cord blood stem cells are rarely used to treat adults, who normally need more stem cells than cord blood has.

What is cord blood banking?

The umbilical cord is usually thrown away after birth. But the blood inside the cord can be saved, or banked, for possible later use. The blood is drawn from the umbilical cord after the cord has been clamped and cut. Cord blood banks freeze the cord blood for storage.

You may save your baby's cord blood in a private bank or donate it to a public bank. Private banks charge a fee to store cord blood for your family's use. If you donate the cord blood to a public bank, the cord blood can be used by anyone who needs it.

During your pregnancy, you may get ads or brochures from private cord blood banks. Some of them suggest that parents should save the cord blood in case the baby should one day need a stem cell transplant. Be wary of banks that urge cord blood banking for this reason. It is not known how likely a child is to need a transplant of his or her own cells, but experts say the chances are very small.\(^1\)
Most transplants of cord blood stem cells use cord blood donated by others to public banks.

One reason why donations to public cord banks are so valuable is that stem cells from cord blood do not need to be as perfectly matched for a transplant as do stem cells from adult bone marrow. Stem cells from cord blood are not as mature, so the transplant patient's body is much less likely to reject them.

**How much does it cost?**

It costs money to store your baby's cord blood. Private banks charge about $1,000 to $2,000 to start. Then you must pay yearly storage fees for as long as the blood is stored. The storage fees cost more than $100 a year. Health plans usually do not cover these costs. Only you can decide if the cost makes sense for you and your family.

Some private blood banks will waive their fees for families who need the stem cells right away.

**What other things should you consider?**

It is very unlikely that anyone in your family will ever need your baby's cord blood.

Doctors worry that the advertising done by private cord blood banks may make some parents feel guilty if they do not want or cannot pay to store their baby's cord blood. Pregnancy and childbirth are emotional times, so learn all you can ahead of time.

If you bank or donate your baby's cord blood, it will be tested for genetic and infectious diseases. What you learn from a genetic test can affect your life and that of your family in many ways.

- Learning that your child is likely to develop a serious disease can be scary or depressing. This information may also affect your relationships with other family members.
- If your child tests positive for a gene that will cause a disease, you may decide to use treatment, if available, to prevent the disease or to make it less severe. Although many treatments work well, others may be unproved or may even be dangerous.

**Private banking:** If you decide to bank your baby's cord blood, make sure that the blood bank you use is approved by a reputable regulatory agency, such as the
American Association of Blood Banks. Look for a bank that has tested and stored many cord blood samples and whose samples have been used successfully in transplants. Ask for a copy of the bank's policies and procedures.

**Public banking:** You may decide that you would like to donate your baby's cord blood. Donating makes the stem cells available to others. It does not cost anything. Unfortunately, it is not yet an option in many communities. Call the hospital where you plan to give birth to find out if you can donate cord blood there.

**Why might your doctor recommend banking your baby's cord blood?**

Your doctor might recommend privately banking your baby's umbilical cord blood if:

- You have another child who has a disease that could be treated with a stem cell transplant.

2. **Compare your options**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bank cord blood</th>
<th>Don't bank cord blood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is usually involved?</strong></td>
<td>▪ Long before birth, you arrange to bank your baby's cord blood.</td>
<td>▪ The umbilical cord is thrown away after birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ The blood is drawn from the umbilical cord after the cord has been clamped and cut.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ A cord blood bank freezes the cord blood for storage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the benefits?</strong></td>
<td>▪ Cord blood in a private bank could be used for a sibling who has an illness that can be treated with cord blood from a baby brother or sister.</td>
<td>▪ You save money by not putting blood in a private cord blood bank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Giving the blood to a public cord blood bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What are the risks and side effects? | Could help research or some other child who needs it. | · Private cord blood banking costs a lot. Banks charge $1,000 to $2,000 to start storage, then fees of more than $100 a year.  
   · Cord blood is tested for diseases. You could find out about a gene that may one day give your child a disease. This news could affect your child's future. | · Your child could later get an illness that could have been treated with a stem cell transplant. But experts say the chance that a child will need a transplant of his or her own cells is very small. ¹ |

**Personal stories**

**Personal stories about cord blood banking**

These stories are based on information gathered from health professionals and consumers. They may be helpful as you make important health decisions.

"When we were expecting, we were swamped with promotions about cord blood banking. They said it was a "once in a lifetime" opportunity to do something that could save our child’s life. It made us feel guilty. Then the doctor told us the odds of our child needing his own cord blood were almost zero. So we decided banking the cord blood would not be a smart use of our money."

— Hank, 32

"Our 2-year-old daughter has leukemia. She will need a stem cell transplant. We have contacted a cord blood bank and are going to have our newborn's cord blood saved and, hopefully, used to save our toddler’s life."

— Sondra, 30
"I did not want to pay to save my baby's cord blood. But I was bothered by the thought of those good stem cells going to waste. So I contacted a public blood bank in my community, and they collected the cord blood so that someone else can use the stem cells in the future."

— Lee, 35

"I liked the idea of donating my baby's cord blood to a public blood bank in case someone else needed it. But I have so many other things to do before my baby is born that I wasn't sure I had time to deal with making the arrangements. As it turns out, cord blood banking isn't available in our small community. That made the decision not to do it easy."

— Theresa, 25

3. What matters most to you?

Your personal feelings are just as important as the medical facts. Think about what matters most to you in this decision, and show how you feel about the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons to bank your baby’s cord blood</th>
<th>Reasons not to bank your baby’s cord blood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think putting the cord blood in a private bank would be worth the cost.</td>
<td>The cost of putting the cord blood in a private bank worries me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More important</td>
<td>Equally important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a young family member who will probably need a stem cell transplant in the future.</td>
<td>No one in my family has an illness that would need stem cells for treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More important</td>
<td>Equally important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will donate the cord blood to a public cord bank if I can, because I'll feel better if the stem cells don't go to waste.

More important       Equally important       More important

I like the idea of banking the cord blood for the future, "just in case."

More important       Equally important       More important

We plan to have more children, and leukemia, Hodgkin's, or sickle cell disease runs in our family.

More important       Equally important       More important

My other important reasons:

More important       Equally important       More important

4. Where are you leaning now?

Now that you've thought about the facts and your feelings, you may have a general idea of where you stand on this decision. Show which way you are leaning right now.
### Banking my baby's cord blood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Banking my baby's cord blood</th>
<th>NOT banking my baby's cord blood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaning toward</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5. What else do you need to make your decision?**

**Check the facts**

1. I should bank my baby's cord blood in case my baby gets an illness that can be treated with stem cells.

   - **True**
   - **False**
   - I'm not sure

   You're right. Doctors do not recommend that you privately bank cord blood on the slight chance that your baby will have a disease that could be treated with stem cells.

2. I have to arrange ahead of the birth to have my baby's umbilical cord blood banked or donated.

   - **True**
   - **False**
   - I'm not sure

   You're right. You have to arrange ahead of time to bank or donate your baby's cord blood. It is not a decision you can make at the last minute before or during your baby's birth.

3. I may be able to donate my baby's cord blood to a public blood bank for use in research or to help other children.

   - **True**
   - **False**
   - I'm not sure

   You're right. Depending on where you live, you may be able to donate the cord blood. Call the hospital where you plan to give birth to find out if you can donate cord blood there.
Decide what's next

1. Do you understand the options available to you?
   
   Yes
   No

2. Are you clear about which benefits and side effects matter most to you?
   
   Yes
   No

3. Do you have enough support and advice from others to make a choice?
   
   Yes
   No

Certainty

1. How sure do you feel right now about your decision?

   Not sure at all          Somewhat sure          Very sure

2. Check what you need to do before you make this decision.

   I'm ready to take action.
   I want to discuss the options with others.
   I want to learn more about my options.

Use the following space to list questions, concerns, and next steps.

Credits

By Healthwise Staff
References

Citations


Other Works Consulted