Commonly Asked Questions

How long does a procedure take?
This is different from patient to patient, but typically, the procedure takes between two and three hours.

How often will I need treatment?
Treatment frequency depends on the disease treated and the patient’s response to the procedure. While some diseases require a short course of treatment, others may require many treatments. Patients should ask their physician and the Apheresis doctor for specific details related to their condition.

What can I do during the procedure?
You can relax, sleep, read or watch television during the procedure, but keep in mind you may have to keep your arms outstretched during the treatment.

Can I have something to eat or drink during a procedure?
Generally, you can eat and drink during your procedure; however, your nurse will provide you with instructions prior, if there are any limitations.

Can I have visitors?
Once the procedure is underway, your nurse will determine if you can have visitors.

How do I make an appointment?
You can call our department at 619-543-5977, or email us at apheresis@ucsd.edu

Special Instructions:
For the two days before treatment drink plenty of fluids. On the day of treatment, for three hours before the procedure, drink as little as possible. Visit the restroom immediately before the procedure.
Plasmapheresis Procedure

Plasmapheresis is accomplished with an Apheresis system that uses a centrifuge to separate plasma from other blood components. The sterile tubing sets and needles are used one time only and then discarded. Specially trained nurses operate the apheresis system and monitor your condition throughout the procedure.

Steps of the Procedure:

To help our patients feel more comfortable about undergoing plasmapheresis, it is important to explain the basic procedure.

Step 1:
To begin, your blood will be drawn by placing a needle into each arm - common procedure for patients with good veins. If the arm veins are small, then a port access or central line can be placed before the procedure – an appointment will be made for the placement.

Step 2:
A liquid, called anticoagulant, is added to the blood to keep it from clotting. The blood and anticoagulant enter the centrifuge of the blood cell separator where the plasma is separated from the other blood components and transferred to a collection bag.

Step 3:
A replacement fluid is added to replace the volume of plasma that has been removed. The mix of the other blood components and replacement fluid is then returned to you.

Step 4:
The apheresis system accomplishes all of the above steps in an automated and continuous manner.

Conditions treated with plasmapheresis
Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Myasthenia Gravis (MG), Chronic Idiopathic Polyradiculopathy (CIDP), Stiff Persons Syndrome, Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO), Optic Neuritis, etc.