

Document 0932

[20932001]

The amount of blood surgical patients can donate and store before surgery can be increased by the new genetically engineered drug, EPO.

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EPO, or erythropoietin, is a protein the human body makes to stimulate the growth of red blood cells.

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A genetically engineered version of the human protein developed by Amgen Corp. of Thousand Oaks, Calif., recently has been marketed by the Ortho Pharmaceuticals division of Johnson & Johnson.

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A competing version of EPO is being developed by Genetics Institute Inc. in Cambridge, Mass.

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The drug is being used primarily to treat anemias.

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A new experiment, reported in this week's New England Journal of Medicine, involved giving injections of Amgen's EPO to 23 patients who wanted to store units of their own blood.

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The patients began receiving EPO injections about a month before their scheduled surgery.

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They then began donating blood twice a week, receiving an EPO injection each time.

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If tests indicated a low number of red cells, blood was n't taken.

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The EPO-treated patients donated an average of 5.4 units of blood each compared with only 4.1 units donated by a similar group of surgical patients who received a placebo injection.

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The volume of red cells donated by the EPO-treated patients was 41% higher per donor, the research team representing a number of hospitals and blood banks reported.