

Mayo Clinic: Why bone marrow donor diversity is needed

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Bone marrow transplants are procedures that infuse healthy blood stem cells into your body to replace damaged or diseased bone marrow. Just like people in need of solid organ transplants, such as hearts or kidneys, people in need of a bone marrow transplant have to find a matching donor.

Dr. Ernesto Ayala, a Mayo Clinic hematologist and oncologist, says bone marrow donations from people of all races and ethnicities are essential in order to help more patients find potentially lifesaving matches.

Diversity is essential in the world of medicine.

"The biggest challenge that we have to find donors to proceed with [bone marrow transplantation](#) is ethnicity," says Dr. Ayala.

He says people who need [bone marrow transplants](#) to fight blood diseases and cancers, such as leukemia, need to find a matching donor.

"The most important factor when we look for a donor is HLA matching. HLA stands for human leukocyte antigens, which essentially are just markers in the surface of the cells," says Dr. Ayala.

Siblings and parents are sometimes matches. Otherwise, a match may be found in the national bone marrow donation registry. The problem is most people registered as donors are Caucasian.

"If I have a patient that belongs to an [ethnic minority](#), then I will only find a donor in the registry in about 20% to 25% of the time," says Dr. Ayala.

Dr. Ayala encourages people of all races to consider being a lifesaving bone marrow transplant donor.

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