

"So too abstaining from blood means not taking it into your body at all." Live Forever p. 216

The human cost of maintaining the Watchtower blood policy

In previous decades untold numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses loyally supported the bans on vaccines and organ transplants. In some cases this loyal support cost them their lives, and we are left wondering how their families must have reacted when the Watchtower Society finally received "new light," and reversed their previous position. ² Donning the cover of the May 22, 1994 *Awake!* magazine are the photos of 26 children, ages varying up to 17 years, with the caption: "Youths Who Put God First." Inside the magazine proclaims: "In former times *thousands* of youths died for putting God first. They are *still doing it*, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue." (page 2) The feature article on page 9 titled "Youths Who Have 'Power Beyond What Is Normal'" tells the stories of three of these children who died after refusing blood treatment. Were their deaths truly necessary?

Loyal adherence to the blood doctrine has cost thousands of Witnesses their lives. Despite this fact, many elders, Hospital Liaison Committee members and longtime Watchtower observers believe it is only a matter of time before the organization reverses their blood policy, and the use of all blood products becomes a matter of conscience.

In the meantime, you are encouraged to fully educate yourself on the issues so that you can make an informed and conscientious choice regarding the use of blood or blood products. Seek alternative non-blood therapies under the advice of qualified medical professionals who can best advise you as to the risks and potential benefits of both accepting or rejecting the use of all blood products, regardless of whether or not these products are presently approved for use by the Watchtower Society.

"...the blood doctrine has cost thousands of Witnesses their lives...were their deaths truly necessary?"



Addendum: The June 15, 2000 issue of The Watchtower announced that Jehovah's Witnesses may now accept "fractions of any of the primary components" of blood. Previously, Witnesses had been permitted to accept only fractions of plasma proteins. This expanded policy will permit JW's to accept numerous additional blood therapies and treatments. The WT specifically mentions interferons and interleukins from white cells and a wound healing factor from platelets. More importantly, the policy opens the door to the use of hemoglobin based blood substitutes like "PolyHeme", that are close to obtaining FDA approval. This is an important development since hemoglobin based blood substitutes, obtained from fractionating red cells, have the potential to save many Jehovah's Witness lives that are presently being lost in cases of trauma or surgery with massive unanticipated blood loss.

References and footnotes

- 1 - Decision on Admissibility of Application 28626/95, p.22, pp.6; Information note no. 148, B. II. (a); Commission Report on Application 28626/95 adopted March 9, 1998, p.4, 17. II. The Council of Europe - European Commission of Human Rights.
 - 2 - Watchtower, 6/1/90 p.31.
 - 3 - Walknowska, J., Conte, F. A., Grumback, M.M. (1969). Practical and theoretical implications of fetal/maternal lymphocyte transfer. *Lancet*, 1, 119-1122; Simpson JL; Elias S, JAMA 1993 Nov; 17;270(19):2357-61; Isolating Fetal Cells in Maternal Circulation For Prenatal Diagnosis by Joe Leigh Simpson and Sherman Elias; *Prenatal Diagnosis*, Vol. 14: 1229-1242 (1994); *Early Human Development* 47 Suppl. (1996) S73-S77.
 - 4 - Watchtower, June 15, 1985, p. 30.
 - 5 - "Make Sure of All Things", Revised 4/1/57, p. 47; Watchtower, Sept. 15, 1961, p. 558. Although the WTS will still occasionally imply that a blood transfusion is feeding on blood, this position has been quietly abandoned beginning in the 1960's, and we usually read statements like "it is wrong to sustain ourselves with blood," although this expression or idea is not found in the Scriptures.
 - 6 - Watchtower, 5/1/68, p.272 para. 7; Watchtower, Aug. 15, 1968, p. 499; The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah - 1971, 2nd ed. p. 216.
 - 7 - Awake! 6/22/72 p.29-30.
 - 8 - Awake! 6/22/82 p.25.
 - 9 - Vaccines see *Golden Age*, 5/1/29, p. 502, Watchtower 12/15/52 P. 764. Organ transplants see Watchtower, Nov. 15, 1967, p. 702; Watchtower, March 15, 1980, p. 31.
 - 10 - Awake! 10/22/90, p. 9
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Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood

The Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood, is a diverse group of Witnesses from many countries, including elders and other organization officials, Hospital Liaison Committee members, Doctors, Lawyers, Child Advocates and members of the general public who have volunteered their time and energies in an effort to bring about an end to a tragic and misguided policy that has claimed thousands of lives, many of them children.

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Do Jehovah's Witnesses Really Abstain From Blood?



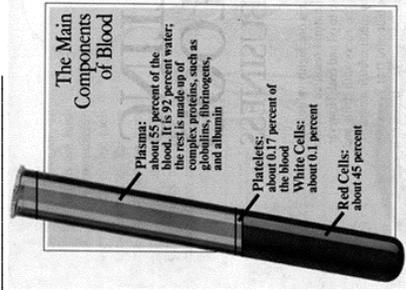
The Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB)

Most Jehovah's Witnesses sincerely believe that it is a gross sin to accept a blood transfusion, since the Bible states that we must "abstain from blood." (Acts 15:29) It is quite understandable that many are confused by the position taken by the Watchtower Society with respect to the various blood components or blood products like albumin, non-synthetic EPO (Erythropoietins), vaccines, Immunoglobulins, and hemophiliac treatments. It does not seem possible to explain why the Watchtower Society will permit a Witness to accept these components, whereas it is a violation of God's law to accept others such as plasma, platelets, red and white cells. These contradictions have caused a number of elders and Hospital Liaison Committee Members to quietly resign. Additionally, the trend in recent years has been to allow more and more blood products. This coupled with the WTS statement to the European Commission on Human Rights that their are no "controls or sanctions" for a Witness who accepts blood and that minors may not carry "Advance Medical Directives" prohibiting blood transfusions are significant indications that the WTS may significantly modify their blood policy or abandon it altogether at some point in the future.1

"...contradictions have caused a number of elders and Hospital Liaison Committee Members to resign...."

Important questions go unanswered

This illustration is taken from the October 22, 1990 issue of *Awake!* You will note that plasma constitutes 55% of the blood. Since the Watchtower Society allows Witnesses to accept the separate components of plasma, it is only reasonable to ask why they forbid the use of plasma itself?



Hospital Liaison Committee members have been asked this question by doctors from around the world. They in turn have sought answers from Brooklyn Bethel and various Watchtower branches. Thus far they are simply told to drop the matter and not to question any further. Why can't the WTS answer this important question?

Since nowhere in the Bible can one find any support for allowing certain blood fractions or products, it is reasonable to ask:

Where does the Watchtower Society find support for their partial ban on blood?

Learning from Jehovah God's creation

Current Watchtower teaching is that the allowed blood components are limited to only those that pass through the placental barrier during pregnancy and that on this basis a Witness may accept them in good conscience.² The reasoning is that since Jehovah God allows these blood components to pass from mother to child, it is logical to conclude that God wouldn't break his own law. This might seem reasonable were it not for the fact that medical science has shown that practically *all* blood components pass through the placental barrier.³ Photograph by Lennart Nilsson



"...practically all blood components pass through the placental barrier."

Are only the smallest blood components permitted?

Sometimes it is argued that the blood components allowed by the Watchtower Society are tiny fractions of blood. Even this line of argument cannot be used since albumin, which is found in blood plasma and is approved for use by the Watchtower Society, makes up a much greater percentage of the blood volume (2.2%) than forbidden blood components like white blood cells (1%), and platelets (0.17%), which Witnesses must reject. Additionally, hemophiliac treatments, which are permitted, require the collection and storage of massive quantities of blood (up to 2500 blood donors for a single treatment), yet the Watchtower Society forbids Witnesses from storing their own blood. Why does a double standard exist?⁴

Learning from the context of Biblical statements regarding blood

If one takes the time to carefully study all of the Biblical accounts regarding blood, it becomes quite clear that whenever the wrongful use of blood is mentioned, it is always in the context of *eating blood*, as the Watchtower itself has acknowledged at various times.

Each time the prohibition of blood is mentioned in the Scriptures it is in connection with taking it as food, and so it is as a nutrient that we are concerned with in its being forbidden.

Watchtower 9/15/58, p. 575



Is a blood transfusion a feeding on blood?

At one time the Watchtower Society taught that it was.⁵ Then in the mid-1960's they learned that transfused blood is not digested but retained in the body much like a transplanted organ. Tragically, by then many Jehovah's Witnesses had already died. Since the Governing Body believed that the end was extremely near,⁶ and that Science would soon provide an effective alternative to blood,⁷ the blood ban was retained, but more and more of the separate blood products were permitted.⁸ The current policy has been developed in a careless fashion over the years and there are many similarities to the Watchtower's previous bans on vaccines and organ transplants.⁹

Simply stated, to receive a nutritional benefit from blood, you would have to eat and digest it so that it could be broken down and used as food. ***No nutritional benefit accrues from a blood transfusion.***



"Transfused blood cannot be used by your body as food anymore so than can a transplanted heart or kidney."

The Watchtower has tried to overcome this fact by arguing that a blood transfusion is no different than being fed intravenously with dextrose or alcohol. These comparisons are misleading, however, because sugar and alcohol can in fact be used by the body as food without digestion. Transfused blood cannot be used by your body as food anymore so than can a transplanted heart or kidney.

Consider two patients who are *unable to eat*, and are admitted to a hospital. One is given a blood transfusion and the other intravenous feedings, *which one is receiving nourishment and will live?* Clearly, doctors do not prescribe blood transfusions to treat malnutrition, but rather to replace something your body has lost, usually the red cells needed to transport oxygen and keep you alive.

Since it cannot be established that a blood transfusion is a feeding on blood or the equivalent of eating blood, then the critical link necessary to Biblically support the Watchtower blood policy does not exist.

How does the Watchtower Society justify their partial ban on blood?

No reputable modern doctor or scientist would state that a blood transfusion is a feeding on blood, or the equivalent of eating blood, but rather *an organ or liquid tissue transplant* as the Society itself now acknowledges.¹⁰ To overcome this fact the Watchtower has created a new law for Witnesses by stating that it's wrong to *sustain life* by means of blood. The problem here is that *nowhere in the Bible do we find such a restriction on blood stated in those terms*. Is eating and sustaining life the same as the Watchtower argues? Well, there are many things that we do to sustain our lives like drinking, breathing, sleeping, etc. Eating is just one of the things necessary to sustain life. This word shuffle is both dishonest and reckless on the Watchtower's part, and obscures the truth of God's word, "going beyond the things that are written."¹¹ (1 Cor. 4:6)

"...the Watchtower has created a new law for Witnesses by stating that it's wrong to sustain life by means of blood."

Do Jehovah's Witnesses really abstain from blood?

Most Jehovah's Witnesses would answer a resounding YES! But as even this brief consideration of the facts has shown, the answer is *no*. Can you explain why the Watchtower Society permits the use of blood products like albumin, EPO, blood serum/immunoglobulins, and hemophiliac treatments (clotting factors VIII & IX) since these are clearly taken to *sustain life*? How can this honestly be considered as abstaining from blood? The obvious answer is that it cannot. If the medical use of blood is wrong, we cannot pick and choose which blood fractions or products we will abstain from anymore than we can engage in a little fornication or a little idol worship. Such reasoning is seriously flawed.