



von Willebrand's

What is von Willebrand's?

Von Willebrand's disease is a bleeding disorder where there is a shortage of von Willebrand's factor, which is one of the proteins in the blood that helps to make blood clot. In von Willebrand's either there is a shortage of von Willebrand factor, or there is plenty of it but it does not work properly. Because of these problems, it takes longer for the blood to clot and for bleeding episodes to stop.

Although it is called a 'disease' you can't catch it -- it is just inherited from your mother or father (or both). For this reason we prefer to just call it 'von Willebrand's'. As it's kind of a long name it's often shortened to 'vWD'.

Can I have it and not know?

Yes. It's quite hard for doctors to tell if you have vWD.

Actually von Willebrand's affects approximately 1% of the population of the UK -- that's one in every hundred -- but most of these people have a mild form of the condition. Those mildly affected may have regular nosebleeds, bruising and in girls, heavy periods. There is also a rare type which is a lot more severe.

- In **type 1**, a person has less von Willebrand factor in the blood than normal. Although the condition can be made worse by taking aspirin and other drugs (these drugs can block blood from clotting), the symptoms might be so mild that the person isn't ever diagnosed. People with type 1 vWD usually don't bleed often, but they can have bleeding with injuries, surgery, or when they have dental work. Type 1 is the most common and the mildest form of vWD.
- In **type 2**, the person's body makes von Willebrand factor but it doesn't work properly, leading to bleeding problems.

There are also different types of type 2...2A, 2B, 2M and 2N.

- **Type 3** patients have severe bleeding problems. The person has no measurable von Willebrand factor and very low factor VIII levels.

Can I get it when I'm older?

Some other illnesses or medicines can lower the amount of vW Factor in your blood. This is called 'Acquired von Willebrand's Disease'.