

# Know the facts: thalassaemia and screening



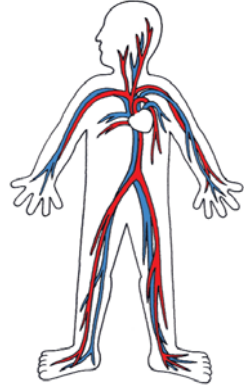
# What is beta thalassaemia major?

Beta thalassaemia major, often called thalassaemia major, is a serious blood condition. It runs in families.

It affects the way blood carries oxygen around the body. There are not enough red blood cells to carry the oxygen.

That's why people with thalassaemia will need extra blood throughout their lives. This is called a blood transfusion. They will also need medicines to help their bodies handle iron all their lives.

People with thalassaemia may get tired easily. They may also have complications with their major organs.



# How do people get thalassaemia?

You can't catch thalassaemia like you catch a cold - it is passed from parents to children through genes.

People can only get thalassaemia if they inherit two unusual genes - one from their father and one from their mother.

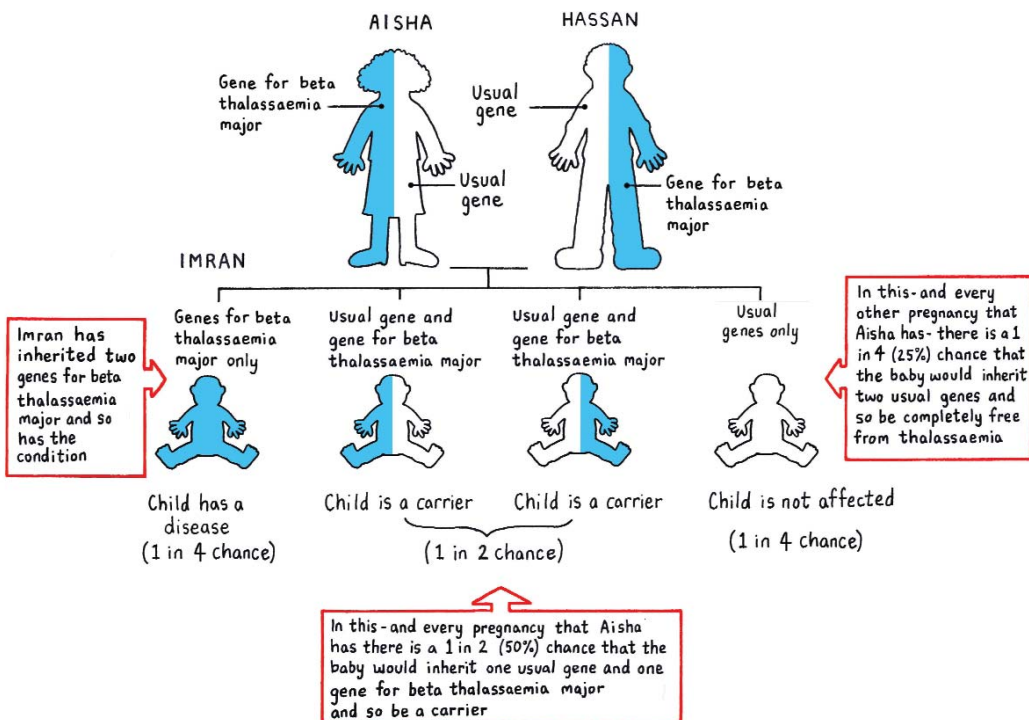
**Genes** are the code that controls your body. For example, your genes control the colour of your eyes, how tall you are - even if you have a beautiful smile!



Aisha and Hassan are both healthy - neither of them actually has thalassaemia. But because they both have one unusual gene, baby Imran does have the condition

We call Aisha and Hassan 'carriers'. People who are carriers are well in themselves. But they can pass on the unusual gene to their children. Each time Aisha and Hassan have a baby, there is a 1 in 4 (25%) chance that their baby will inherit thalassaemia. Their next child could have thalassaemia as well or be a carrier or be completely free from thalassaemia.

The picture below shows how they passed on the condition to Imran.



# How do I get tested?

The test for thalassaemia is to find out if you are a 'carrier' - if you carry one unusual gene.

If you are a carrier, there is a chance you could pass on the unusual gene when you have a baby. Because carriers are generally healthy, you will not know if you are a carrier unless you have the test.

It is a simple blood test that takes just a few minutes - just ask your family doctor (GP) or your local thalassaemia centre.

All pregnant women and newborn babies in England are offered a test for thalassaemia major. But it is a good idea to know if you are a carrier before you decide to have a baby. If you are already pregnant you should have the test before 10 weeks.



## Did you know?

- In England, about 210,000 people 'carry' the gene for thalassaemia
- You can have the test at any time in your life. It is a good idea to find out about the test before you decide to have a baby.

**For more information speak to your GP or visit [www.sickleandthal.org](http://www.sickleandthal.org)**

