



HOPE begins with you.

A Student's Guide to Blood Donation

Why Should I Give Blood?

Because you can make a difference!

Almost everyone during their life will know someone who needs a blood transfusion. They may be car accident or trauma victims, cancer or transplant patients, or people with sickle cell disease or other blood disorders. There is no substitute and still only one source of blood for transfusion—volunteer blood donors.

This guide will provide you with information about measures you can take before, during, and after donation for a good experience.

Learning more about blood donation and knowing what to expect should improve your donation experience.

What Happens During the Blood Donation Process?

1. Registration

- Remember to bring your ID, and if required, the signed parental consent form.
- Bring the names of medications that you are taking.
- Bring a list of the places you have traveled outside the U.S. and Canada in the last 12 months.
- Read the educational materials about donating whole blood or apheresis.
- Ask Red Cross staff if you have questions.

2. Health History and Mini-Physical

- You should feel healthy and well, and meet other criteria.
- We will take your temperature, check your blood count, and measure your blood pressure and pulse.
- We will ask you questions during a private and confidential interview. This protects your health and the safety of patients who receive blood transfusions.

3. Donation

- We will cleanse an area of your arm and insert a needle to draw whole blood.
- You can relax, listen to music, talk to other donors, or read while the blood is collected.
- After the collection, a staff member will remove the needle and place a bandage on your arm.

4. Refreshments

- You should spend 15 minutes or more enjoying refreshments in the refreshment area.
- If you become dizzy or lightheaded, stay in the refreshment area and tell a staff member immediately.

What Should I Do to Prepare?

Before Donation

Sleep: Get at least 8 hours of sleep the night before your donation.

Eat: Eat a healthy breakfast or lunch—both if your appointment is later in the day.

- Don't skip meals on the day of a donation.
- Make healthy food choices. Eat proteins (lean meat, cheese, and yogurt) or complex carbohydrates (bread, cereal, and fruit).
- Eat a well-balanced diet with plenty of foods that are rich in iron and vitamin C. Iron-rich foods include red meat, fish, poultry, beans, iron-fortified cereals, and raisins.

Drink: Drink a few extra glasses of water or fluids in the days before you donate. Start the day with a bottle of water or a glass of orange juice. If you drink water within 10-30 minutes before donation, you may be less likely to experience dizziness and lightheadedness.

During Donation

Most people relax during donation and feel fine afterwards. Sometimes it helps to think about something else to distract your attention from the blood being drawn.

You will receive some information on applied muscle tension (AMT). AMT is a simple technique consisting of cycles of repeated contraction and relaxation of the abdomen and legs. If you practice this technique during the donation, you may be less likely to have a reaction.

Tell Red Cross staff immediately what you are experiencing, and they will take care of you. There are ways to help prevent or limit discomfort with donation.

After Donation

Be sure to sit and relax in the refreshment area for 15 minutes or more and have a drink and a snack. Afterward, drink a few glasses of fluids to stay well hydrated.

Most donors have uneventful donations and feel good about donating. Some people may experience lightheadedness, dizziness, or an upset stomach that resolves soon after donation. Less commonly, a donor may faint after blood donation. If you feel faint, stop what you are doing and sit or lie down until you feel better.

Call the American Red Cross toll-free number provided to you after your donation if you have questions or concerns.



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Student Athletes

Student athletes should not do any heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for the rest of the day. You temporarily lose fluid after donation, which your body replaces within 24 hours or sooner if you drink extra fluids. As a precaution, do not donate blood on the same day of a competition or strenuous practice.

After a whole blood donation, your body replaces the red blood cells (the cells that deliver oxygen to muscles and tissues) within about 5 weeks, depending on nutrition and iron status. High-performance competitive athletes may notice a marginal decrease in exercise tolerance for about 1 week after a whole blood donation.

Plan ahead to best schedule your donation with sports and other activities.

Additional Information for Parents and Students

Parental permission is required for all donations by 16-year-olds and for donations by 17-year-olds as required by state law or sponsor. In order to provide informed consent, parents must go to <https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/how-to-donate/info-for-student-donors.html> and read “Possible Use of Donor Information and Blood Samples in Medical Research” and the research study sheets for your state. For those with no internet access, please call the Donor and Client Support Center at 1-866-236-3276 for information regarding research studies in your state.

It is recommended that females under the age of 19 not donate Red cell apheresis, also known as “power reds.” Red cell apheresis donations are limited to male donors under the age of 19.

When parental consent is required, we will need a signed consent form for each donation. Most donors have uneventful donations and do fine afterwards. Some donors may become lightheaded or dizzy during or after the donation or may faint or experience injury requiring additional medical care. Young, first-time, and low-weight donors are more likely to experience reactions than other donors.

Donating blood, particularly red cells, removes iron from the body. Healthy iron levels are important for overall health, physical and mental development, and help to maintain strength and energy. Low iron, also known as iron deficiency, may lead to health problems, including anemia (not enough red blood cells or hemoglobin). To help replace the iron lost by blood donation, we recommend taking a multivitamin with 18 mg of iron or iron supplement with 18-38 mg of elemental iron for 60 days after each whole blood donation and for 120 days after each red cell apheresis donation.

For more information about iron and healthy blood donation, please visit our website at <http://www.redcrossblood.org/iron>. If a donor chooses to take iron, we recommend that the donor tell their health care provider.

Every donation is tested for HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), the hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses, and other infectious diseases. If any test result or response to a donor screening question suggests that the donor is disqualified from donating blood in the future or may have an infectious disease, their donor record will be marked accordingly. When required, we report donor information, including test results to health departments and regulatory agencies.

The infectious disease tests are very sensitive and specific, but it is possible that donors who are not infected will have false positive results. We are required to notify and disqualify donors even if subsequent test results indicate a donor is not infected.

Whole blood and red cell apheresis (power red) donors will also be tested for ferritin, a test for iron stores. Donors will be notified of ferritin test results outside our acceptable ranges.

We will communicate test results directly with the donor. We maintain the confidentiality of information we obtain about a donor and we will release a donor’s confidential information to his or her parents or guardian only with the donor’s consent.

We may use information or residual blood samples we collect from donors confidentially and anonymously for medical research. Examples of this type of research include studies to increase the safety of the blood supply.

If you have questions about blood donation, please contact the American Red Cross.