

# How to prepare for a Great Donor Experience

The American Red Cross wants your donation to be as safe and successful as possible. The following suggestions may help you prepare for your blood donation.

## Between donations

Give your body plenty of iron. When you donate whole blood or double red cells, your body loses some iron contained in red blood cells. Eat plenty of iron-rich food to replace these cells between donations. Foods rich in iron include:

- red meat
- beans
- spinach
- fish
- iron-fortified cereal
- raisins
- poultry
- prunes
- broccoli

Also, foods rich in Vitamin C (such as citrus fruit) help your body absorb the iron you eat. But avoid drinking tea, coffee and other caffeinated beverages with meals since caffeine can reduce iron absorption.

## Before donation

Sleep well. Get at least eight hours of sleep the night before you plan to donate.

Eat a good breakfast or lunch. This also will help your body be well prepared for giving blood.

Maintain a nutritious, well-balanced diet with foods rich in iron and high in vitamin C.

Make sure you are feeling well.

## Day of donation

Drink extra water and fluids before you donate to replace the volume of blood you will donate. You should continue drinking extra fluids after donation, too.

Eat the right foods. Having foods containing lean proteins or complex carbohydrates, such as bread, cereal, fruit or lean meat may make you feel more comfortable during and after donating.

Avoid fatty foods, such as hamburgers or french fries, before donating. The tests that are part of our vigorous safety screening can be affected by fatty materials that appear in your blood for several hours. When this occurs, testing cannot be performed, and we may not be able to use your blood.

Relax! Spend 10 to 15 minutes relaxing in the refreshment area. Have a drink and snack to rejuvenate yourself.



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## To be eligible to donate blood you must:

- be at least 17 years old (16 with parental permission in some states)
- meet height and weight requirements (at least 110 pounds based on height)
- be in generally good health

## Before donating you should:

- get a good night's sleep
- drink plenty of fluids
- eat within 2-3 hours

## Be sure to bring your:

- donor card or a government issued photo I.D.
- parental consent form if you are a 16-year-old donor
- wear clothing with sleeves that can be raised above the elbow

# Iron FAQs



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To help patients in need regain their health, the Red Cross relies on healthy donors. Healthy habits, including maintaining your iron and hemoglobin levels, can also help improve your donation experience.

Learn more about being a healthy blood donor at [redcrossblood.org/healthydondors](http://redcrossblood.org/healthydondors).

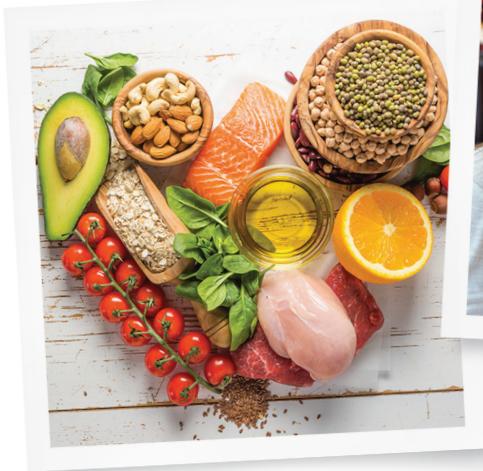
## How will I know if my iron level is healthy enough to donate?

Prior to donating, the Red Cross will test a droplet of your blood to measure your hemoglobin level. Hemoglobin is a protein in red blood cells that contains iron and gives blood its red color. Hemoglobin carries oxygen from your lungs to nourish all the tissues in your body.

To be healthy enough to donate, men must have a level of at least 13.0 g/dL and women must have a level of at least 12.5 g/dL. If your hemoglobin is too low, we'll ask you to wait and try to donate another time.

## What is iron and how can I keep my levels healthy?

Iron is a mineral nutrient that your body needs to function normally. You need iron to make new red blood cells to replace those lost during blood donation. Your body gets iron from your diet, which is why we encourage donors to maintain a nutritious, well-balanced diet with plenty of foods rich in iron and high in vitamin C.



## What if I'm deferred for low hemoglobin?

You may be able to donate again in the future. It is normal for hemoglobin levels to fluctuate, but there are some things you can do to help boost your levels:

1. Choose foods rich in iron and create food combinations that will increase the absorption of iron:
  - the best source of iron is lean red meat
  - for non-meat meals, choose iron-rich foods such as legumes
  - include plenty of vitamin C in your diet
  - consider fortified foods, or foods with added iron such as some breakfast cereals
2. Drink tea, coffee and milk between meals instead of with meals
3. Consider eating iron rich snacks such as raisins, nuts, dates, prunes or figs

Some donors, especially those who are young or donate frequently, may want to talk with a health-care provider about taking a multivitamin with iron or iron supplement to help replace iron lost through blood donations. You can learn more about iron levels and blood donations at [redcrossblood.org/iron](http://redcrossblood.org/iron).

