

What if my hemoglobin level is too low when I arrive to donate?

Prior to donation, Memorial Blood Centers performs an FDA-required hemoglobin screening. If your hemoglobin levels fall below the minimum level required, you will not be able to donate. Low hemoglobin is the most common reason why donors are deferred from giving blood.

While the routine hemoglobin test for blood donors provides a measure of the red blood cells in your hemoglobin, it does not measure iron stores. In fact, you may meet the minimum hemoglobin threshold even though your body's iron stores may be low. If you are deferred from donating blood due to low hemoglobin, consider consulting your physician to find the course of action that's right for you. We recommend you wait 2 to 4 weeks before you try to donate again.

Does loss of iron due to blood donation affect women and men differently?

Yes. Women naturally have a lower hemoglobin level than men, and as a result, tend to be deferred more often than men. In fact, many pre-menopausal women have low stores of iron, which may not be enough to replace the red blood cells removed in a single donation.

Please contact our Donor Services team at donorcare@mbc.org with any questions.

Make a date to save a life today!

Join Memorial Blood Centers' mission to save lives through blood donation—as a donor, volunteer, financial contributor, or blood drive sponsor. Visit MBC.ORG or call **1-888-GIVE-BLD** (888-448-3253).

Are you eligible to give?

Visit MBC.ORG/Guidelines to review our donation criteria.

About Memorial Blood Centers

Memorial Blood Centers has been saving lives for 70 years as an independent nonprofit supplying life-saving blood to area hospitals and other partners throughout the U.S.

Additional information and educational resources are available

American Society of Hematology:
www.hematology.org

Mayo Clinic:
www.mayoclinic.org

The role iron plays in blood donation



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Get ready to give a life-saving gift to someone in need.



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Creating blood cells, sustaining life

Iron is an essential element for most living things. Red blood cells are red because of the iron-containing protein called hemoglobin that transports oxygen from the lungs to the tissues. For blood donors, iron is needed to make new red blood cells to replace those removed during donation.

How does blood donation affect my supply of iron?

Since iron is carried in hemoglobin, when you donate red blood cells, iron is removed as well. For infrequent donors, this depletion of red blood cells and iron has minimal effects on health. For younger donors, pre-menopausal women, and frequent donors of either sex, however, blood donation may significantly reduce the body's iron stores.



What can I do to maintain an adequate reserve of iron?

You may consider taking multivitamins with iron or iron supplements that can be purchased over the counter at your local pharmacy. Current recommendations vary—from a daily multivitamin with iron (19 mg iron) to elemental iron caplets (38-45 mg iron), for a period of 2 to 3 months before or after your donation. Consider consulting your physician or pharmacist to determine what dose, type, and duration of iron supplement to choose, and to determine whether taking supplements is right for you based on your body's needs and any other medications you may be taking.

Could I take just a single, large dose of iron to replace what I lose during a blood donation?

No. The human body limits the amount of iron it can absorb (about 2-4 mg/day). Taking iron in larger doses for a shorter period of time may not lead to better absorption and may result in more side effects. The overall goal is to replace the 200-250 mg of iron lost during blood donation over the course of 2 to 3 months. Large doses of iron, taken at once, may be toxic. This medicine should be stored safely away from children.

Is donating blood safe?

Yes. Donating blood is safe when you are healthy and meet the donation guidelines available on our website. Our staff are available to answer any questions you have about blood donation.



Can I include iron in my diet?

Yes—dietary iron can be found in meat, seafood, poultry, iron-fortified cereals, whole grains, beans, peas, and dark green vegetables. While eating a well-balanced diet is important for all blood donors, simply eating iron-rich foods is unlikely to replace all the iron removed during blood donation. If you are a frequent blood donor, or if you are a pre-menopausal woman or a young donor, you may want to consider taking a multivitamin or an iron supplement. Consider consulting your physician or pharmacist to determine what's right for you.

How may low iron affect me?

Low iron may affect donors differently. Possible symptoms include fatigue, decreased exercise capacity, and pica (a craving to chew things such as ice or chalk). In more severe cases of iron deficiency anemia, weakness, or paleness may occur. In addition, low iron stores may increase the possibility of having a low hemoglobin test result, preventing blood donation.