

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 photo 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 US 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 & 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 recovery area.
- If you become dizzy or light-headed, stay in the recovery area and tell a staff member immediately.

What Should I Do To Prepare? Before Donation

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

Eat: Eat a healthy breakfast or lunch - or 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).
- Include iron-rich foods in your regular diet (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 light-headedness.

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 may also be told to try a simple technique to tense and relax the muscles in your legs:

- Lift your legs (one at a time) off the donor bed.
- Hold for a few seconds, then repeat.
- Breathe normally.

If you practice this technique to tense and relax the muscles in your legs 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 light-headedness, 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 wait about 12 hours or more to resume strenuous exercise after blood donation, depending on how they feel. 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.

Information for Parents

Parental permission is required for all 16-year-olds to donate blood. It may or may not be required for 17-year-olds depending on state laws and school requirements.

When we are required to obtain parental consent, your son or daughter will need to turn in a signed consent form to the donation site each time he or she plans to donate.

Most donors have uneventful donations and do fine afterwards. Some donors may become light-headed or dizzy during or after the donation or may faint or experience an injury requiring additional medical care. Young, first-time and/or low weight donors are more likely to experience reactions than other donors.

Every donation is tested for HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses, and other infectious diseases. If any test result or response to the questions suggests that your son or daughter is disqualified from donating blood in the future or may have an infectious disease, their name will be added to a confidential list of people who have similar test results or risk factors. 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 falsely positive results.** We are required to notify and disqualify donors even when subsequent test results indicate that the donor is not infected.

We will communicate test results directly with your son or daughter. 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 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.



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