

All About Donating Blood

January is National Blood Donor Month



Blood donations are an important part of being prepared to provide effective treatment to those that have been severely injured. Having replacement blood readily available helps to ensure the recovery of those impacted by natural disasters, traffic collisions, workplace injuries, and other life-threatening occurrences. Here are frequently asked questions about blood donation so you can determine if donating blood is for you.

Is donating blood safe?

Donating blood is a safe process. Needles and bags used to collect blood are used only once and then discarded, helping to reduce the possible spread of infection to the donor.

Can I give if I have been turned down before?

The common reasons for which donors are turned away from donating blood are temporary, not permanent. For example, one common reason for a deferral is low iron levels in the blood. Iron levels fluctuate daily and are affected by what you eat, so they do not permanently disqualify a prospective donor. Check the eligibility requirements to see if

you're eligible to donate. A "mini-physical" is given to all potential donors to ensure they are healthy enough to donate.

How often can I give blood?

Regulations in the United States allow people to donate whole blood once every 56 days. The waiting period between donations can be different for other blood components. For example, donating only platelets in a process called apheresis requires only a 3-day waiting period before a person can give again. Donating two units of red blood cells through a similar process doubles the waiting period to 112 days.

How do I know if I am eligible to donate blood?

You must be in good health, be at least 17 years old, and weigh at least 110 pounds. You will also need to pass physical and health history reviews prior to donating. There is no upper age limit on your ability to donate. Conditions that require a temporary deferral are pregnancy, travel to certain parts of the world, inoculations, some health conditions, and certain medications. Call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE or check the eligibility requirements to get answers to specific eligibility questions you may have. Eligibility requirements may also vary for some states and blood centers. Final eligibility is determined by medical professionals at the time of donation.

Are the health history questions and my test results confidential?

Yes. The health history will be conducted by a trained professional in an individual booth arranged to preserve confidentiality. Your answers will be kept confidential, except where required by law. If your blood tests positive to any of the administered standard tests, you will receive confidential notification. The Red Cross maintains strict confidentiality of all blood donor records.

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What can I do if I am not eligible to donate?

While you may be unable to donate blood, there are other ways you can help. You can help organize a blood drive, recruit other suitable donors, or volunteer at fixed sites or mobile blood drives to help create positive donor experiences. Monetary donations are another way to help ensure that safe blood can be provided to those who are in need. Learn more about how you can help by contacting your local office of the American Red Cross.

How can I ensure a pleasant donation experience?

You'll want a good night's sleep the night before and a good breakfast or lunch before your donation. Drink fluids like juice, milk, or soda ahead of time. Take your normal medications as prescribed. Ensure you have adequate iron levels by making iron-rich foods part of your daily diet. These include red meat, poultry, fish, green leafy vegetables, iron-fortified cereals, nuts, raisins, and prunes. During your donation, relax. After your donation, have some juice and cookies in the "canteen." Then, you can go about your daily activities, but avoid heavy lifting or strenuous exercise for the remainder of the day. See the tips for a good donation experience.

Should I give blood now or wait until I am called?

Under normal circumstances, eligible donors are encouraged to donate as often as possible. Please call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE or schedule an appointment online. During emergency circumstances, please listen to media reports in your area and donate as requested.

How long does it take to donate blood?

The whole process takes about an hour. It starts with registration, a health history, and a mini-physical. The actual donation usually takes less than 10-12 minutes. Afterward, you will be asked to spend a few minutes in the "canteen" where you can have a light refreshment before returning to your normal activities.

How much blood is taken — won't it make me weak?

A blood donation equals approximately one pint of blood. The average adult body has 10-12 pints. The vast majority of people will not feel any different because of the donation. A very small percentage may experience temporary dizziness, but some rest and fluids will help you feel better quickly. Your body will replace the lost fluid within 24 hours.

What will happen to my blood after I donate?

Each blood donation is assigned a unique computer

barcode number, which will identify it throughout its path from the donor to a hospital patient. Immediately after the blood donation, the blood is placed into transport containers designed to keep it at a safe temperature until it reaches a Red Cross component laboratory. Samples of the blood donation are simultaneously sent to one of nine Red Cross National Testing Laboratories to be tested for transmissible diseases. In the component lab, the blood is separated into its components: red blood cells, platelets, and plasma. The products are then placed in quarantined, temperature-controlled refrigeration units until the test results are received (usually 12-16 hours later), and afterward the blood can be released for distribution or destroyed. From local distribution centers, the blood is transported to hospitals based on patient need. Hospital personnel then transfuse the blood or blood products to a patient in need.

Can I direct my blood donation to an individual?

Patients scheduled for surgery may be eligible to donate blood for themselves in the weeks before non-emergency surgery in a process known as autologous donation. If an autologous donation is not used, it is discarded. Family members and friends can also make directed donations. Directed donations are fully tested, so if they are not used by the intended patient, they can be released for use by other patients.

Can I direct my blood donation to the military?

The American Red Cross has created a strong operations network that helps us direct your blood donation to the areas of the country — or the world — where they are most needed. While you can't direct your donation to be specifically routed to military personnel, you can be sure that it will be sent to the areas of most critical need.

For more information:

<http://www.redcross.org/donate/give/>



Balancing Your Post-Holiday Budget

What Should I Do If I'm Over My Head in Debt?

The holidays are over, but you might still be paying for them. The holiday spirit causes many of us to be generous beyond our means. If you now find yourself in over your head, there are many options available to put you on the path to a balanced budget.

Before even worrying about the legal consequences of not being able to pay back all of your debts, the first thing you have to do is shut down your spending. Cut up your credit cards and pay for everything in cash. Draw up a household budget and stick to it. Start eating at home. Learn to control your spending.

You have to come up with a game plan on how you're going to deal with your debt. You can begin by gathering up all your financial records and organizing them. Next, you want to prepare a financial summary by putting it all down on paper. Start out by listing all of your present sources of income and any anticipated changes in the future, good and bad. Then, list information about all of your debts, including the creditor, the type of debt, the amount owed, interest rates, repayment terms, collateral, and who is responsible for repaying the debt. Don't forget about taxes you may owe.

Having this information at your fingertips will hopefully bring things into focus for you in terms of how to deal with your debt. Perhaps more importantly, though, it gives you a concise financial picture that you can use

to get advice from others on how to deal with your problems.

There are many paths you can take and the decisions won't be easy. So don't try to resolve all of your problems by yourself without first seeking advice from people you can trust. For practical advice and moral support, you'll probably first want to talk to your parents, siblings, or even close friends. Keep in mind, though, that they may find it difficult to give you objective advice.

Before you get too far down the road, you'll want advice from professionals who deal with these types of problems on a day-to-day basis. These people would include:

- Lawyers
- Accountants
- Debt Counselors
- Financial Planners
- Intervention Counselors
- Financial Mediators
- Insurance Agents
- Bankers or Mortgage Loan Brokers

If they are given concise and accurate financial information, financial advisors may be able to quickly diagnose the situation and lay out your options. You may even be able to get some preliminary help for free. But you should have the expectation of having to pay these advisors at some point if you're truly going to benefit from their services. In the grand scheme of things, financial advisors have ways of working out payment arrangements for people like yourself, and whatever you pay them may be money well spent.