

YOUR IRON LEVELS & BLOOD DONATION

As a generous blood donor, your health and safety are our main priority. Whether this is your first time donating or you have been giving blood for years, it is important to know how your hemoglobin level, which is an iron/protein molecule in your red blood cells, may be affected by donating blood and steps to follow to ensure you feel your best.

WHAT IS HEMOGLOBIN & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Hemoglobin is an iron/protein molecule in red blood cells that allows our red blood cells to carry oxygen to cells, tissues, and organs. During the donation process, we measure your hemoglobin level with a finger prick to ensure your iron levels are high enough to donate safely. Each time you make a blood donation (which contains red blood cells), you lose some iron with your donation. If you lose iron faster than you can replace it through your diet, you may become anemic. Many donors have adequate iron levels to donate blood safely, but frequent blood donors should be aware that blood donation may lead to low iron levels or anemia.

WHAT ARE OTHER CAUSES OF LOW IRON LEVELS?

In addition to frequent blood donation, low iron stores can result from:

- Menstruation and pregnancy
- Diets with low iron intake
- Decreased iron absorption from certain medications
- Disease of the digestive tract
- Other types of blood loss (e.g., stomach ulcers, polyps)

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF ANEMIA?

Other causes of anemia not related to low iron stores include:

- Chronic disease (such as diabetes, severe arthritis, or kidney disease),
- Immune destruction of red blood cells
- Acute blood loss
- Vitamin deficiencies



LifeServe
BLOOD CENTER

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YOUR BLOOD. YOUR HOSPITAL. YOUR NEIGHBORS.

IF I HAVE A LOW HEMOGLOBIN LEVEL...

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Often, people with low hemoglobin levels have no symptoms. Those suffering from abnormally low levels, known as anemia, may notice:

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Pale skin
- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Cold hands and feet
- Dizziness

DO I NEED TO SEE A PHYSICIAN?

LifeServe Blood Center cannot determine the cause of your low hemoglobin level. If you find at the time of your donation that you do have a low hemoglobin level and you are not a frequent blood donor, then you may wish to have your hemoglobin level rechecked.

If you donate three or more times a year and do not have other causes of anemia or low iron levels, your low hemoglobin could be related to blood donation. Simply increasing the amount of high iron foods in your routine diet or taking iron supplements should restore your iron levels to normal during the next several months.

CAN I CONTINUE TO DONATE BLOOD?

Absolutely! Approximately 10 percent of potential donors are not able to donate blood at one time or another due to low hemoglobin level. If your hemoglobin is low, we encourage you to follow the steps above to increase your level prior to your next donation. If you received an abnormally low level and/or are symptomatic, please speak with your primary physician before you attempt to donate again.

HOW CAN I INCREASE MY IRON LEVEL?

To increase your iron, we encourage you to:

1. **Consume iron rich foods, which include:**
 - Red meat (especially liver) and tofu
 - Fish and shellfish (especially clam, oyster, and shrimp)
 - Spinach or other dark leafy vegetables
 - Peas, lentils, chickpeas, and soybeans
 - White, red, or baked beans
 - Iron-fortified cereals and breads
2. **Consume adequate amounts of vitamin C to aid with iron absorption.**
3. **Speak with your doctor or dietician about vitamin supplements containing iron.**