



# The Basics of Blood Donation

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## Nervous about giving blood? Learn what to expect.

**Donating blood can save a life. No chemical, drug or fluid can replace human blood in a real emergency. If you've never donated blood before, you might be nervous. Here's what to expect.**



### Step 1: Registration and health checkup

When you arrive at a blood donation center or blood drive, you'll be asked to register. You will fill out a form with some basic information, including your name, date of birth and social security number. You will also need to show an ID card.

Next, you'll talk with a health technician. She or he will ask you some questions about your general health and lifestyle to make sure you are eligible to donate blood. You will be asked questions about your sexual activities, any intravenous drug use or if you have symptoms or a diagnosis of viral hepatitis.

It's important to be complete and truthful when giving information. This is both for your safety and the safety of those who may receive your blood. All information you provide is kept confidential.

Finally, you will fill out a form, in private, where you can acknowledge whether your blood is safe to donate.

Before you give blood, a technician will take your temperature, check your blood count and pulse, and measure your blood pressure. These checks are to make sure, again, that you are healthy enough to donate blood.

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Nervous about giving blood? Learn what to expect. *(continued)*

## Step 2: Donating blood

First you will sit or lie down on a cot. A technician will clean an area of your arm where blood will be drawn. He or she will check the area to find the best vein from which to draw blood. The vein often becomes visible after gently tapping the area with a finger or squeezing a small ball or roll of gauze. The technician will also tie a rubber band (the tourniquet) around your upper arm to swell the vein briefly for puncture.

A needle is gently inserted into the vein and blood slowly flows through a tube into a bag for storage. It usually takes 10 to 20 minutes to fill a bag of blood. You'll sit quietly relaxing during this process.

## Step 3: Rest and recovery

After your blood donation is complete, you spend a few minutes resting and having juice and a snack. It's important to stick around the donation site for 10 to 15 minutes to make sure you feel OK. After blood donation, a few people may feel weak, dizzy or faint from the drop in blood pressure.

There is almost no risk to donating blood. Less than 10 percent of your blood is removed, and the body quickly makes new blood to replace it.

## What happens to my blood?

Blood is separated into three components: red blood cells, which can be stored for 42 days; platelets, which last five days; and plasma, which can be frozen for as long as one year.

You can give whole blood every eight weeks. The time between donation of different blood components like plasma or platelets varies.

Type O blood is the most commonly used because it can be safely transfused to people of all blood types.

## Do I qualify to donate?

**Generally, you can give blood if you:**

- Are at least 17 years old
- Weigh at least 110 pounds
- Are in good health

**To make a donation, call one of these numbers:**

- National Red Cross hotline at 1-800-GIVE-LIFE
- America's Blood Centers at 1-888-256-6388
- AABC at 1-866-376-6968

# Become a lifesaver.

## Blood donors are heroes. By donating blood you can save a life.

That's because no chemical, drug or fluid can replace blood in a real emergency. Blood collections are rising, which is good news. The bad news is, the demand is increasing faster than collections, and the nation's blood banks are facing persistent supply problems, national blood-supply groups say.

Donations traditionally slump during the Christmas holiday season, as colleges, schools and businesses that normally host blood drives close and families take vacations. An outbreak of influenza and bad weather also can affect donations.



Maintaining an adequate amount of blood for surgeries, trauma victims and treatment of diseases can be difficult.

Every day about 38,000 units of red blood cells are given to Americans. Blood transfusions are used for trauma victims, patients needing surgery, and those getting treatment for leukemia, cancer or sickle cell anemia.

# The Basics of Blood Donation

## Become a lifesaver. (continued)

### Why is blood use rising?



About 4.5 million people receive blood transfusions in the United States every year, and that number is expected to rise for several reasons:

- As the U.S. population grows older, the number of surgeries that require transfusions (heart, knee-replacement, and hip-replacement operations, for example) will likely rise as well.
- Procedures and surgeries that require numerous transfusions are becoming more common. A bone-marrow transplant patient needs three weeks of transfusions,

and a person undergoing a liver-transplant operation requires 20 units of blood or more.

### The basics of blood donation

Blood is separated into three components: red blood cells, which can be stored for 42 days; platelets, which last five days, and plasma, which can be frozen for as long as one year. You can give blood every eight weeks, plasma twice a week and platelets 24 times a year. Type O blood is the most commonly used because it can be safely transfused to people of all blood types.

## Reluctant to donate blood? Don't be.

### Misunderstandings and fears often prevent people from donating much needed blood that could save someone's life

Blood donations are used daily in your community hospital. Each day, patients need blood transfusions because of accidents, cancer, surgery, burns, childbirth and other situations. Yet, only 5 percent of Americans who are able to give blood actually do.

Blood cannot be manufactured. The only way for hospitals to keep their blood banks full is through volunteer donors. Donated blood has a limited shelf life, so new donations of all blood types are needed every day.

How much do you know about donating blood? It takes only about 10 minutes to draw the blood and not more than an hour of your time overall, including the paperwork. Consider the following information if you have been reluctant to be a blood donor:

- **Donating blood is safe.** New, sterile needles and bags are used to collect blood. They are disposed of after each use to eliminate the possibility of infection.
- **Your personal information is kept confidential.** If your blood tests positive for hepatitis or another disease, the results remain private and you are the only one notified.
- **Giving blood will not make you weak.** Most adults have 10 to 12 pints of blood in their bodies. You'll feel little or no effect after donating one pint.
- **It won't hurt!** You'll feel a pinch from the needle, but just for a few seconds.



- ▶ You can safely donate blood every 56 days. Your body typically replaces the fluid lost within 24 hours.
- ▶ You're never too old to donate blood as long as you are in good health. You must be at least 17 years old and weigh at least 110 pounds.
- ▶ If you take medication, it doesn't mean you can't give blood. For instance, most people taking blood pressure medication and those with diabetes can donate blood without a problem



### You should wait to donate, or not donate, blood if:

- ▶ You have received a blood transfusion from another person in the United States.
- ▶ You received a blood transfusion in certain countries in Africa since 1977.
- ▶ You had leukemia or lymphoma, including Hodgkin's Disease.
- ▶ You are taking any "blood thinner" (such as Coumadin® or heparin).
- ▶ You have a fever or a productive cough (bringing up phlegm).
- ▶ You had hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) caused by a virus, or unexplained jaundice (yellow discoloration of the skin), since age 11.
- ▶ You have AIDS or have ever had a positive HIV test, or if you have done something that puts you at risk for becoming infected with HIV.
- ▶ You have ever received clotting factor concentrates.
- ▶ You have active tuberculosis or treatment for same.
- ▶ You have engaged in sex for money or drugs since 1977.
- ▶ You have had hepatitis since your 11th birthday.
- ▶ Other circumstances may make you ineligible to give blood.



To make a donation, call the national Red Cross hotline at **1-800-GIVE-LIFE**, America's Blood Centers at **1-888-256-6388** or the AABC at **1-866-376-6968**.



America's Blood Centers has a national educational program called "My Blood, Your Blood" (**[www.mybloodyourblood.org](http://www.mybloodyourblood.org)**) to teach children and teens about the importance of giving blood.