



Volunteer Blood Donor Month

A Good Time to Give

Every two seconds in the United States, someone needs blood. Whether it is used to help an accident victim, an organ donor recipient or a patient with cancer, more than 38,000 blood donations are needed in hospitals every day around the country.

There is never a bad time to donate blood; however, there are times when donations – particularly new volunteer donors – are needed all the more. The winter months usually bring a general shortage of donors. Many people find themselves traveling for the holidays, out of their normal routine and unable to donate. Others may be affected by illness or inclement weather.

To be eligible to give blood, you must be a healthy individual over the age of 17, who has not donated in the past eight weeks (56 days) and weigh at least 110 pounds. That means, if you began giving blood at the age of 17 and donated every 56 days until the age of 76, you would have donated 48 gallons of blood and potentially helped save more than 1,000 lives! Donors who contribute regularly often say they do so because they want to help others. Remember, because blood cannot be manufactured, there is no substitute – it must come through generous voluntary donors.

What to Expect

Along with the rewarding feeling that comes with donating blood, many people are anxious or nervous about donating. The number one excuse given for not donating blood is fear. Feeling scared is normal, but know what to expect can alleviate fears. Although giving blood for the first time can be intimidating, many donors will assure you that it's a simple process that is endlessly rewarding.

When you first report to your blood donation appointment, you will be provided with information about giving blood. Then, a trained professional will ask you to present a photo ID and run through a list of questions about your health history during a private interview. This information is kept confidential and is used for your safety and well-being during the donation process. After gathering your history, the staff member will conduct a mini-physical to obtain your pulse, blood pressure, iron level and temperature before that actual donation begins. Remember, you can leave at any point with no questions asked.

Following the interview, staff will cleanse your arm and carefully insert a needle. You will feel a slight pinch when the needle is inserted, and the hard part is over. Now all you do is sit back and relax for seven to ten minutes while the blood is collected. Each donation is taken with a brand new, sterile needle that is discarded after use leaving no risk for contamination or disease transmission. About a pint of blood in all will be taken. A bandage is placed on your arm. Wear your bandage proud and as a reminder that with this donation, you may have saved as many as three lives. Finally, you are invited to sit, rest and enjoy refreshments such as juice and cookies. These goodies aren't a bribe, the body needs a little time to rest and make adjustments to the decrease in fluid volume from the donation process. After resting, you can continue on with your day having just spent approximately one hour at the donation site.

Tips for a Pleasant Donation Experience

There are some things you can do to ensure your donation experience is as pleasant as possible, both before, during and after giving blood.

- Get plenty of sleep before donating and eat a good meal
- Drink extra water to help replace the fluid you will donate
- Eat iron rich foods such as red meat, fish, poultry and cereals
- Avoid fatty foods such as burgers and fries before donating as tests can be affected by fatty materials and may cause your sample to be discarded
- Wear a shirt with sleeves that can be rolled above the elbow and show staff any "good veins" that have been successfully used in the past
- Rehydrate by drinking plenty of fluids for 24-48 hours following your donation

Help Save a Life

So many lives are touched every day by individuals who take time out of their schedules to donate blood. Volunteer Blood Donor Month comes during a time when blood resources are usually low due to different factors such as the travel and the weather. This year resolve to make a difference by becoming a volunteer blood donor.

For more information such as myths about donating blood and specific eligibility requirements and questions, visit GiveLife.org or call 1-800-GIVELIFE. You can also contact your [local Red Cross Blood Region](#) to find out about a blood drive near you.

Source: American Red Cross