

The Donation Process, Step-by-Step

Donating blood is safe and simple. Whether you choose to give through a mobile blood drive or at a donation center, the process is very similar.

How can I prepare?

To make your donation as easy as possible and to avoid complications, follow these tips.

- **Sleep well:** Try to arrive for your blood donation well-rested. Although everyone has different needs, aim for around 8 hours of sleep the night before.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drink plenty of water. Before you donate, drink at least 16 ounces of water for the best blood donation experience. Drinking water helps reduce the risk of low blood pressure during blood donation, which is the most common cause of fainting. It also makes your veins easier to access and can speed up your donation. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can dehydrate you.
- **Eat healthy:** Avoid foods high in fat like fries or ice cream. Donating blood can make your iron level drop—you can prepare your body by eating foods rich in iron and vitamin C before you donate. Some examples of these kinds of foods include:
 - Beans and lentils
 - Nuts and seeds
 - Leafy greens like spinach or broccoli
 - Citrus fruits
 - Berries
- **Get your ID cards ready:** Bring a form of identification, such as a driver's license or passport, to your donation appointment. The type of identification needed may vary by donation center.

- **Dress comfortably:** Be sure to wear a short-sleeved shirt or one with sleeves that can be rolled up above your elbow.

What happens during the donation?

The donation process varies slightly depending on the kind of donation. Signing in and doing the health check can take 30–45 minutes. A whole blood donation takes less than 15 minutes. Platelet, red cell, and plasma donations may take between 80–120 minutes. The general donation process is outlined below.



Registration: You will sign in, show your ID, and read some information about donation.



Health history and health check: You will fill out a questionnaire about your health, travel, and lifestyle to confirm your eligibility. Someone will also check your temperature, blood pressure, red blood cell or hemoglobin levels, and pulse.



The donation: You will be seated in a comfortable position while your arm is cleaned and sterilized. You will stay seated while blood is drawn from your arm. When the donation is done, you will get a bandage on your arm. A whole blood donation is up to 500 milliliters, or about 17 ounces.



Refreshment and recovery: You will enjoy a light snack and drink while waiting 10–15 minutes before you should leave and resume your daily activities.

What should I do after I donate?

Keep your bandage on for the next several hours. Once you take it off, keep the area clean by washing it with soap and water. You should refrain from vigorous activities for at least 4 hours after you donate, and should be sure to stay hydrated for the next 48 hours. Consider eating foods rich in iron or vitamin C to help your body restore key nutrients.

Some donors may experience mild dizziness, lightheadedness, fatigue, bruising, bleeding, or pain, but these symptoms should go away fairly quickly. If you experience severe symptoms, contact a doctor immediately.

“

I'm alive
because of
the people who
selflessly gave
their blood.”

—Ariana

When can I donate again?

There is an ongoing need for blood, so make blood donation a regular habit. Every 2 seconds, someone in the United States needs blood. Regular donations from a variety of people guarantees that anyone who needs blood can get it. It also ensures that the United States has a steady supply of donor blood and there will never be a shortage.

How often you can donate depends on what kind of donation you choose. There are guidelines to be sure your body has enough time to fully recover and replenish between donations. The minimum time between donations is listed below.

- Whole blood donation: 56 days
- Platelet donation: 7 days
- Double red cell donation: 112 days
- Plasma donation: 28 days



Find a donation center near you and make an appointment to save a life today.
Visit hhs.gov/giveblood/locator.

