

How to Prepare for a Successful Blood Donation

There are a few things you can do before going to donate blood to ensure your donation goes smoothly. To feel your best, be sure to get seven to nine hours of sleep the night before. It is also important that you wear a shirt that allows the blood technician easy access to your arms. I suggest wearing short sleeves, or a loose-fitting shirt that can easily be rolled up. If you are concerned about being cold or have an appointment during a workday, a cardigan or zip-up sweater is a great option. Don't forget to double-check that you have your donor card or two pieces of ID before leaving home.

One of the first things the technicians will do when you check in is prick your finger to check your hemoglobin levels. Hemoglobin is an iron-containing protein responsible for giving your blood its red color. To qualify to donate blood, your hemoglobin levels must be at least 12.5 g/dl in women and 13.0 g/dl in men. If your hemoglobin levels are too low, you will be asked to postpone your donation until they increase.

Iron directly affects your body's ability to produce hemoglobin. If you don't have a pre-existing condition such as anemia, a delicious way to ensure that your hemoglobin levels pass the finger stick test is to indulge in a juicy steak the night before. If you do not eat meat, lentils, beans, dried fruit, tofu, and eggs can also help boost your iron and hemoglobin levels. Try to avoid fatty foods before your appointment, as this can lead to an excess of fat in your blood and interfere with the testing process, rendering your blood unusable.

Being well hydrated is another important component to a successful donation. Try to drink an additional two cups of water the day of your appointment. This will help regulate your blood pressure and reduce the likelihood of you feeling dizzy or fainting. If your blood pressure is below 90/50 or higher than 180/100, you will be asked to reschedule your appointment. If you are concerned about your blood pressure, talk to your doctor prior to the appointment.

Dos and Don'ts After Donating Blood

Congratulations! You have helped save a life. Now it's time for your post-donation care. Follow these dos and don'ts for a speedy recovery.

Eat: Let yourself indulge in the free cookies or sugary treats at the blood drive. Go crazy and wash them down a glass of milk or juice. Eating these sugary treats will help get your glucose levels up and prevent light-headedness, fainting, and shock.

Avoid Smoking: It is advised that you refrain from smoking in the first couple hours after donating blood. Having a cigarette too soon after your appointment can lead to increased dizziness.

Relax: Donating blood is the perfect excuse to skip the gym! You will want to avoid any vigorous activities for at least five hours after donating blood. Some experts even recommend waiting 24 hours before you engage in strenuous sports or weightlifting. When you do resume exercising, you should contact your doctor immediately if you feel lightheaded, dizzy, or nauseous, or have muscle spasms or pain in your arm.

Toast with Water: Consuming alcohol is ill-advised for 24 hours after donating blood. Opt instead for water or fruit juice. Almost half of the blood you donate is made up of water, so it is important to drink plenty of water before and after your appointment. Rehydrating will help your blood volume levels quickly return to normal.

Badge of Honor: Keep the bandage on your arm for at least five hours. Make sure it stays dry. If you have persistent bleeding through the bandage, contact a health professional.

Stay Off Your Feet: Jump in the express lane at the grocery store and grab a seat on crowded public transport. After donating blood, you want to do your best to avoid standing for long periods of time.

Keep Cool: It is important to avoid overheating, so refrain from taking hot showers, lounging in direct sunlight, and consuming hot drinks.