THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MEDICINE

Blood Donation Center

The vast majority of people feel fine after giving blood, however it is always important to eat a healthy, well-balanced meal before donating and to be well-hydrated. This allows your body to recover as quickly as possible after donation as well as provides the best possible blood product for our patients.

Eating an iron-rich diet, especially in the days preceding your donation, is an important way to help your body recover after blood donation.

Does blood donation affect my iron levels?
Red blood cells (RBCs) contain iron and therefore blood donation removes some iron from your body. All blood donors, even platelet and plasma donors, lose some RBCs (and iron) with their donations.

Why does iron loss matter?
Your body needs iron to make new RBCs and to perform other metabolic tasks. Iron comes from either preexisting iron stores in your body or iron in the food you eat. Many menstruating women may not have enough iron stored in their body to make RBCs to replace their donation. Men have more iron stores; however, with frequent donation, iron stores in men can also become depleted.

Does the University of Chicago Medicine Blood Donor Services test for low iron stores in my body?
Not directly. Donor Services tests your hemoglobin, a measure of your RBC level, but not your iron stores. You may have enough hemoglobin to donate blood even though your body's iron stores are low.

Low iron stores are common, particularly in women of childbearing age.

How would low iron stores affect me?
As iron stores become depleted, the body loses the ability to produce enough new RBCs, and anemia results. While anemia interferes with blood donation, it can also cause health problems such as fatigue and decreased exercise capacity.

What can I do to replace the iron I lose through my donation?
Eating a well-balanced, iron-rich diet is helpful. The recommended daily allowance (RDA) for iron varies by gender, but is at least 8mg for all adults.

<u>Some Foods High in Iron</u>
Beans
Broccoli
Brussel Sprouts
Dried Fruits

Leafy Green Vegetables
Molasses
Nuts
Peas
Prunes and Prune Juice
Poultry
Red Meat
Shellfish & Fish
Strawberries
Sweet Potatoes
Tomatoes and Tomato Juice

What about iron supplements?
If diet alone does not replace all the iron lost from blood donation, taking iron supplements may help.

There are many different types of iron supplements. The University of Chicago Medicine Blood Donor Services does not provide prescriptions for over-the-counter iron products. Please ask your doctor if you have any questions about your underlying health conditions and starting iron supplements. Your doctor or pharmacist may be able to assist you in deciding what dose, type, and duration of iron supplement to choose.

Donors who take one multivitamin with iron (typically 18 mg elemental iron) each day for 3 months, or one iron caplet (commonly 325 mg tablets of ferrous sulfate which provide about 65 mg of elemental iron) each day for 7-8 weeks, can replace the amount of iron lost in one unit of donated RBCs.

DO NOT TAKE MORE THAN THE RECOMMENDED DOSAGE OF IRON BECAUSE HIGHER DOSES CAN BE HARMFUL. Iron-containing supplements should be properly stored to prevent accidental ingestion by babies and children.If your child swallows an iron pill, contact a poison control center right away.

More information
http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional/
http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/vitamins/iron.html