

Here's what you need to know about iron!



I was deferred today because of low blood count. Why couldn't I donate?

We're sorry you had a "low" blood count today, and weren't able to donate.

We care about your health, so we check the blood hematocrit level of everyone who comes in. Hematocrit is the percentage of red blood cells in your blood. For men, a normal hematocrit is in the range of 39-51%; for women, 36-45%. Your test result today was below the minimum level for donating blood.

Red blood cells carry oxygen throughout your body. When you make a donation, it removes red blood cells and iron from your body. We always make sure you have enough red blood cells to donate safely.

Don't worry—low blood count is usually temporary, and you'll likely be able to donate again soon. On an average day, about one-in-ten donors is deferred because of a low hematocrit.

What causes a low blood count?

In most cases, a low hematocrit is caused by insufficient iron in the body. If you are in good health but have a low hematocrit, you may need to increase the amount of iron-rich food in your diet. Suggested foods are included on the back of this handout. Today's diets tend to be lighter, with less iron-rich foods like as red meat.

Here's what we recommend if you were deferred from donating today:

- You are a first time or occasional donor: If you are a man or a woman (non-menstruating), you should visit your healthcare provider about your hematocrit before trying to donate again.
- You are a menstruating woman: You should take steps to increase iron levels in your body. Iron supplements may also be helpful. If the supplements do not help in a short period of time (several weeks), a visit to your healthcare provider is encouraged.
- You are a frequent blood donor (3 or more times a year for men; 2 or more times a year for women): we appreciate your dedication as a donor. Frequent donation can sometimes result in reduced iron stores. You can find helpful tips to increase your iron stores on the reverse side of this form.

For more information about iron deficiency and maintaining a healthy iron balance, be sure to visit BloodworksNW.org/iron



As a regular or frequent blood donor, what do I need to know about iron?

For some people, frequent donation (three or more times a year for men; two or more times a year for women) can sometimes result in reduced iron stores. We strongly urge regular and frequent donors to consider extra measures to rebuild your iron stores after every whole blood or red cell donation.

Maintain Healthy Iron Levels

Iron: Your body—and everybody—needs it! Iron is an essential mineral that helps move oxygen to all the organs and tissues in your body, and helps turn food into energy. Your good health depends on iron, just like we depend on you as a blood donor.

Frequent donors may need help

If you give blood as frequently as 3 times a year, recent studies have shown you are likely to need iron supplements.

Foods to boost your iron level

The best way to boost your iron level is to eat a healthy diet with plenty of iron-rich foods. These include beans, nuts, seeds, dark leafy greens, root vegetables, dried fruits, enriched and whole grain breads, lean red meats, shellfish, whole grains, and eggs. Maintain healthy iron levels by eating regular, nutritionally balanced meals, and drink plenty of fluids.

Women need more iron

Low iron levels can be quite common, especially for women, whose bodies naturally require more iron. The recommended daily amount of iron for women is 18 milligrams, and for men is 10 milligrams. Many food labels list iron levels for the food inside the package.

Tips to increase your iron level:

- Iron supplements may help replace lost iron and may be taken daily. Iron tablets (like all supplements and medicine) should be used with guidance from your health care provider, and be stored out of reach of children (Iron supplements are not recommended if you are known to have Hemochromatosis or Crohn's disease).
- Having vitamin C along with iron increases your body's absorption of iron (orange juice, citrus fruits, tomatoes, cantaloupe, strawberries).
- Meats have the highest iron content, so vegetarians have to work harder to get enough iron, but still have lots of good dietary choices.
- Even cooking in an iron skillet adds iron to whatever you are making (true!).

Some foods and beverages may decrease iron absorption, including caffeine (coffee, tea, colas) as well as some antacid medications.

Please visit [BloodworksNW.org/iron](https://www.bloodworksNW.org/iron) for more information about iron and your body.

