PRE-DONATION INFORMATION ON IRON DEFICIENCY AND MAINTAINING IRON BALANCE
Thank you for coming in.

We care about your health and want you to know that donating blood reduces iron stores in your body. In many people, this has no effect on their health. However, in some people, particularly younger women or donors of either gender who donate frequently, blood donation sometimes may remove enough iron that it may impact your iron stores. We want you to understand this more clearly.

How does blood donation affect iron stored in my body?

Iron is needed to make new red blood cells to replace those you lose from donation. To make new red blood cells, your body either uses iron already stored in your body or uses iron that is in the food you eat or in vitamins or iron supplements you take.

Does the Blood Center test for low iron stores in my body?

No, the Blood Center tests your hemoglobin but, not your iron stores. You may have a normal amount of hemoglobin and be allowed to donate blood even though your body’s iron stores are low.

How may low iron stores affect me?

There are several possible symptoms associated with low iron stores. These include:

• Fatigue
• Decreased exercise capacity
• Pica (a craving to chew things such as ice or chalk)
• Restless Leg Syndrome

In addition, having low iron stores may increase the possibility of having a low hemoglobin test and prevent you from donating blood.
What can I do to maintain my iron stores?

1. Eat a well-balanced diet including iron-rich foods such as meats, vegetables, beans and cereals.

2. Consider taking an iron supplement (19-45 mg iron) that is available over the counter. Multivitamins with iron (8-19 mg) are also available.

Iron supplements vary in name and the amount of iron within the tablet/caplet. Current recommendations suggest taking iron supplements for 8 weeks to 3 months. In general, higher doses of supplemental iron will be more effective in maintaining iron stores. Therefore, we recommend taking 38-45 mg iron tablets daily for 60 days (two months) after each blood donation. If you experience gastrointestinal side effects you can try taking lower dose iron tablets.

If you continue to have a low hemoglobin test or experience symptoms of anemia while taking iron supplements, you should see your physician to evaluate other causes of low hemoglobin.

Why doesn’t a single big dose of iron replace what I lose during the donation?

In general, your body can only absorb a small portion of the iron you get from your diet and supplements. Taking iron in larger doses for a shorter period of time does not lead to better absorption (and may result in more side effects). The overall goal is to slowly replace (over 8 weeks to 3 months) the 200-250 mg of iron lost during donation.

Where can I get additional information?

If you have additional questions or need more information, you can call the Medical Help Desk at 800.310.9556 or talk with your physician. It is also important to make your physician aware that you are a blood donor. You may also reference The American Society of Hematology’s website on iron deficiency anemia at www.hematology.org/Patients/Blood-Disorders/Anemia.
Iron Source.doc

Hemoglobin is the part of your blood that carries oxygen to your tissues. Iron is an essential part of hemoglobin. When you donate blood, it is important to restore the iron in your body. There are two recommended ways to increase your iron:

1. Eat a variety of foods rich in iron.
2. Take iron supplements containing ferrous sulfate.

INTRUCTIONS FOR TAKING IRON (FERROUS SULFATE)

If you choose to take an iron supplement or your doctor has recommended one, the following instructions may be helpful.

- Take with food.
- Take with juices rich in vitamin C (orange juice, grapefruit, or tomato juice). Iron is more easily absorbed when taken with vitamin C.
- Since iron can cause constipation, it is advisable that you drink plenty of fluids and eat raw fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products. Check with your doctor if constipation becomes a problem.
- In addition to constipation, you may experience a mildly upset stomach and a darkening of your stool. If you experience severe side effects, please call your doctor. He/she may reduce the dosage of your iron supplement or advise a reduction in the number of times per day you take the pills.

Adapted from the AABB Interorganizational Task Force on Donor Hemoglobin Deferrals