

### How might low iron affect me?

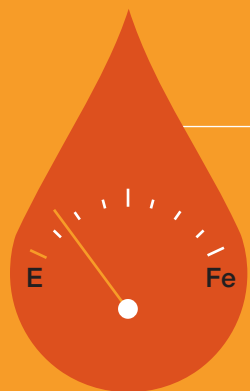
Effects of low iron vary and may include fatigue, decreased exercise capacity, and pica (a craving to chew things such as ice or chalk). Having low iron may also make you more likely to have low hemoglobin, which temporarily defers you from donating blood.

### What does it mean if I'm deferred from donating due to low hemoglobin?

Your hemoglobin level is tested before every blood donation. Low hemoglobin is the most common reason why donors get deferred.

Hemoglobin contains iron, but testing your hemoglobin does not test your iron level. In fact, you may have a normal amount of hemoglobin and be eligible to donate even though your iron is low.

If you are deferred due to low hemoglobin, we recommend that you wait one month before attempting to donate again, and consider consulting your physician to find the right course of action for you.



#### Low hemoglobin

The #1 reason for blood donation deferral

Please contact our Donor Services team at [donormail@ncbb.org](mailto:donormail@ncbb.org) with any questions.

## Make a date to save a life today!

You can give the gift of life at any of our community donor centers or blood drives. Appointments can be made online at [NCBB.ORG](https://www.ncbb.org) or by calling 1-877-486-9414.

### Are you eligible to give?

Visit [NCBB.ORG/Guidelines](https://www.ncbb.org/Guidelines) to review our donation criteria.

### Additional information and educational resources are available

American Society of Hematology:  
[www.hematology.org](https://www.hematology.org)

Mayo Clinic:  
[www.mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)

### About Nebraska Community Blood Bank

Nebraska Community Blood Bank has been saving lives since 1968 as an independent nonprofit supplying life-saving blood to Nebraska and western Iowa hospitals as well as other partners throughout the U.S.



# IRON AND BLOOD DONATION

Learn more about the role iron plays in blood donation.

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# Creating blood cells, sustaining life

Iron is an essential element for most living things. Iron helps the body make new red blood cells, which is especially important after donating blood. Red blood cells are red because iron is found in hemoglobin, which is a protein in red blood cells that transports oxygen.

## How does donating blood affect my iron supply?

When you donate red blood cells, hemoglobin and iron are also removed from your body. If you only donate once in a while, this loss of iron will have minimal health effects.

However, donating blood frequently or on a regular basis can affect how much iron your body stores, which can affect your health. This is especially true for young donors and premenopausal females. Females generally have lower baseline amounts of iron and hemoglobin and are deferred more often than males for this reason.



## Is donating blood safe?

Yes! Donating blood on a regular basis is safe when you meet general eligibility guidelines, which are available on [NCBB.ORG](https://ncbb.org). Our expert staff are available to address any questions you have.

## How often should I donate blood?

You can donate whole blood every 8 weeks (56 days) and double red cells every 112 days. We recommend donating whole blood once per season (3–4 times per year), or double red cells twice per year (every 6 months) to ensure your body maintains a healthy iron level.

For more information about eligibility and blood donation frequency visit [NCBB.ORG](https://ncbb.org)

## How can I maintain a healthy iron level?

Take an over-the-counter iron supplement or multivitamin that contains iron. A daily dose of 19 mg is usually sufficient. In some cases your physician may recommend taking elemental iron caplets (38–45 mg iron) for 2–3 months before or after donating.

Consider consulting your physician or pharmacist about whether taking iron is right for you, especially if you donate blood frequently, are a young donor, or are a premenopausal female.

## Could I take just a single, large dose of iron to replace what I lose during a blood donation?

No. The human body limits the amount of iron it can absorb at one time. The goal is to replace the 200–250 mg of iron lost during a blood donation gradually, over 2–3 months. Large doses may result in more side effects and may be toxic.



## Can I include iron in my diet?

Yes. Dietary iron can be found in meat, seafood, poultry, iron-fortified cereals, whole grains, beans, peas, and dark green vegetables.

Eating a well-balanced diet is important for all blood donors, although eating iron-rich foods is unlikely to replace all the iron lost during a blood donation. A daily multivitamin or iron supplement is the best way to maintain a healthy iron level.



A daily multivitamin or iron supplement is the best way to maintain a healthy iron level while saving lives

