



SAVE LIVES: GIVE BLOOD!

Apparently, when pessimists give blood, they see themselves as a tenth empty rather than nine tenths full... B Negative, you see! But – assuming you are generally healthy and genuinely interested in donating – here are a bunch of tips to make sure it's a swift, effortless process! And straightaway: thanks for making time to give blood if you can – you may help save a life every time you do it.

Safety first: Giving blood is usually very straightforward, and has a terrific safety record. You'll need to take it a little easy for a few hours after; it's the perfect excuse to avoid operating machinery, lifting, stretching or any kind of exertion... That includes hobbies such as climbing, flying or diving, and occupations such as crane or HGV operating, some building and emergency service work.

Most people following this advice will feel fine before, during and after the donation. A small percentage of people feel a little faint or dizzy afterwards and are looked after on site! If they've left, the best advice is to lie down with the legs slightly raised and to let someone know they're feeling unwell. In the unlikely event that it persists, more info is available on [0300 123 23 23](tel:03001232323). Assuming you'll be among the vast majority who scarcely notice a difference, though...

Whoooooo are you? Who, who, who, who?

A great many people are able to donate blood! If you're aged between 17 and 65, and weigh over 50kg (7st 12), it's worth taking the online questionnaire to establish suitability. It takes around one to two minutes to complete and will instantly give you an indication. Go to <http://www.blood.co.uk/can-i-give-blood/donor-health-check> to find out!

Location, vocation, donation: If you hear the call and feel compelled to give blood, you'll be pleased to learn donation-locations are many and varied! Check out your nearest sessions via <http://www.blood.co.uk/SessionSearcher/Search.aspx>... There are vehicular units, as well as 'in situ' collections, so you might be surprised at just how close by – and how convenient – a donation will be.

"It may be just a smear to you, mate, but it's life and death to some poor devil..."

The now legendary 'Blood Donor' episode of 'Hancock's Half Hour' did quite a bit to raise the public's awareness of the amount that's donated... For the uninitiated, though: you give one or two drops of blood to test its iron content, then the actual donation is 470ml; just under a pint. Astonishingly, this blood is made up again in a very short period of time – usually as little as 24 hours.

Do you come here often?

Regular donors are advised to give blood just 3 times a year! Every donation counts, though, so if you only try it once, that'll help! For those who can commit, it's usually possible to book the next session while attending a donation. 'NHS Blood and Transplant' are excellent at keeping track of when your next appointment is and reminding you it's coming.



"Me and my shadow..."

You can take a friend along to donations for company and, indeed, book a group of people in to donate at around the same time if you're quick off the mark... Oh yes! You can book slots; it's not like the old days! Donate at your greatest convenience by setting up the next appointment:

Online via www.blood.co.uk/

While you're at a session

By telephone, 24 hours a day, on: 0300 123 23 23

Alternatively, you can just turn up on the day – things might take a little longer, though, as there may be a queue.

You're in!

If you've registered and booked, you can help keep things moving by taking a filled-in 'health questionnaire' with you. One is routinely included with the confirmation of appointment letter... In our experience, it's worth popping this in your pocket or handbag the night before so as to make sure it's on you as you head out the door!

I'm giving blood tomorrow and haven't a thing to wear...

One thing that's easily overlooked is the suitability of clothing when donating blood! It's important to know that tight clothing around the arms can restrict blood flow and cause bruising, so you're advised to wear something loose and comfortable.

There always seems to be a tip about food...

Yes indeed! And the DMI 'Giving blood food tip' is: to eat about three hours before donation, ideally... But absolutely do eat something; it will help keep your blood-sugar levels stable and this will stand you in good stead after the donation! Continue to eat at your regular mealtimes once you've donated.

Feed me, Seymore! As regards quite what you should eat that day... Well, you can't go wrong with light, protein packed foods: certain cereals are terrific; an egg on toast, a sandwich or piece of fruit will also be super! If you find, when your blood is tested for iron, that you generally need more in your diet, take that into account in a wider context...

Switching to a diet with more red meat, eggs, spinach and whole grains will probably give you noticeably more energy. Vitamin C, meanwhile, helps increase the body's ability to absorb iron, so eating more citrus fruit can also help. And no, 'Opal fruits' don't count. *



Drink to me only...

At least as much as eating something is important, so is drinking something! Drink plenty of water or fruit juice the night before you donate and on the morning itself. Remember, you're about to donate a pint of liquid from your body to someone who needs it more, and drinking helps keep blood pressure up. But...

Don't practice abstinence... Perfect it! One of Stu's friends drank so heavily before donating that his blood group was 80 proof. We jest, of course... But, actually, you should avoid drinking alcohol the evening before donating blood, and on the day itself, as this considerably affects hydration and delays recovery.

"May I be excused, Sir?" Caffeine is, of course, a diuretic, so drinking excessive amounts of tea, coffee or stimulant drinks is also a little ill advised! You need to be taking on more fluid leading up to and following the donation. Stick to water or, if you're one of the many people that thinks water's too plain, drink fruit juices, smoothies or flavoured water. Finally, smoking – and you don't need a lecture about it – is awful for the body at the best of times; right after giving blood, though, it will almost certainly cause dizziness and is to be avoided for a couple of hours.

ReIIIIlaaaaaaxxxxxxxxxxx!

The needle going in feels like a little pinch on your arm; usually the one you use less! If you want to distract yourself as it's positioned, take a deep but gentle breath in, and let it out immediately and smoothly! Stay relaxed. Chat to a friend, if you took one along, or plan the rest of the day in your head! Many people who regularly give blood don't really pay much attention to what's going on – Rhiannon chats to her Mum on the next bed, DeeJ listens to his iShuffle and some people simply focus on the good of the deed!

Cup of tea?

For about 10 to 15 minutes after the donation, you're encouraged to sit down, eat a biscuit and drink something – tea, squash, water... This allows the donation team to keep an eye on you and reminds you to eat, drink and take it easy for the rest of the day. It also gives your body a short adjustment period and lets any faintness – rare though it is in our experience – pass.

"Spread the religion of 'The Rhythm of Life'!"

It does seem that no matter how much blood gets given, more can always be used... See if you can persuade friends, colleagues and family to go along and give. Feel free to point them in the direction of this Info Sheet if they'd like a few tips, then have them see if they able to donate...

<http://www.blood.co.uk/can-i-give-blood/donor-health-check>

* We know, we know... They're called Starburst now! But we didn't yield when Coco Pops became Choco Krispies and we won't yield on this!

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