

Blood Donor Educational Materials

Iron Information for All Blood Donors

At UCLA Blood and Platelet Center, we feel there are a few things you should know about Iron and blood donation to ensure you remain a healthy blood donor.

Iron Depletion

- Donating blood removes iron from your body.
- Your body needs iron to make new red blood cells. Red blood cells are, in turn, needed to provide oxygen from your lungs to all the tissues in your body. Low levels of iron can cause, or worsen, anemia – a condition where you have decreased healthy red blood cells.
- Studies have shown that frequent blood donation can contribute to iron deficiency. On average, you lose approximately 200 to 250 mg with each whole blood donation, which takes your body 3-15 weeks to replenish.

Potential Side Effects of Iron Depletion

- Anemia
- Fatigue
- Exercise intolerance
- Headache
- Irritability
- Pica –a condition of craving or chewing nonfood substances such as clay, ice or chalk.

Managing Your Iron Post-Blood Donation

- Eat a well-balanced diet
- All blood donors should add foods rich in iron and foods that increase your body's ability to absorb iron (such as foods rich in vitamin C) to their diet. Iron rich foods include leafy greens, lentils & beans, meat, seafood, eggs and peanut butter.
- Frequent blood donors should also take a multivitamin with iron or an iron-only supplement to replace iron lost through whole blood donation.
- Large iron doses **DO NOT** lead to better absorption and may result in more side effects.
- Before taking a multivitamin with iron or an iron-only supplement, we recommend you consult your health-care provider to determine the dosage and type of supplement that is right for you.

