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. The test you had is called a “hematocrit.” Hematocrit is the percentage of red blood cells in your blood. For men, a normal hematocrit is in the range of 42-51%; for women, 36-45%. Your test result today was below the minimum level for donating blood.

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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 blood count.

What causes a low blood count?

In many 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. Some suggestions are included on the back of this handout.

What should I do if my count is low?

Making sure you have a normal hematocrit is very important to your good health. In some cases, a person whose blood count is chronically low may have anemia, which means a blood count lower than the normal range.

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, and donate during times in your cycle when your body is not experiencing blood loss. Also, a visit to your healthcare provider is encouraged.

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

If you are a regular donor who has never been deferred from donating because of a low hematocrit, we still want you to be informed about the impact of donation on your body’s iron level. You are a local hero, and we want you to stay healthy!

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 iron deficiency. We strongly urge regular and frequent donors to consider extra measures to rebuild your iron stores after every whole blood or red cell donation. This handout includes suggestions about boosting your iron level, and sources of information about high iron foods.

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

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.

Maintain healthy iron levels by eating regular, nutritionally balanced meals, and drink plenty of fluids.

Coming Back to Donate

Thank you for coming in today. Hospitals and patients in our community depend on a steady supply of lifesaving blood. We look forward to seeing you again.

Some tips to increase your iron level:

- 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.
- Multivitamins with iron may help replace lost iron and may be taken daily, but 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.
- 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 psbc.org/iron for more information about iron and your body.