

HEMATOCRIT

Thank you for coming to donate blood. We are sorry that we cannot accept you as a donor today because your hematocrit level was too low. We care about your health and want to help you understand what having a low hematocrit level means. You are not alone, having a low hematocrit level is the most frequent cause for not being able to donate blood. You may return to donate when your hematocrit level has increased and you can help immediately by asking your friends, family and/or coworkers to donate. There are several simple ways to improve your hematocrit level. You may be eligible to donate another time.

What is Hematocrit?

Blood is made up of red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. Hematocrit is the percentage of blood volume that is red blood cells. Red blood cells contain hemoglobin which carries oxygen to all the cells in the body.

Why do we test potential blood donors for hematocrit levels?

Hematocrit is measured prior to each donation as part of donor screening. According to U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), hematocrit must be at least 38% for a donor to be able to donate blood for another person. The purpose of having a cut-off for minimal acceptable hematocrit is to protect donors from becoming anemic (meaning their red blood cell levels are lower than normal) from donating blood.

What are the most common causes of low hematocrit and anemia?

- Iron deficiency from a low-iron diet
- Iron deficiency from frequent blood donation (3 or more times per year)
- Iron deficiency from menstrual blood loss
- Vitamin deficiency from a diet low in folate, vitamin B6 or B12

If your low hematocrit or anemia is caused by any of the conditions listed above, eating a diet high in iron rich foods and taking a daily vitamin and iron supplement may help you raise your hematocrit. A call to your healthcare professional for further guidance may be advisable.

What are other common causes of anemia?

Chronic illness such as:

- Arthritis
- Diabetes
- Kidney Disease

You should be under the care of a physician if you have these conditions. Let your physician know about your low hematocrit. He or she will work with you to find the best treatment option for your particular needs.

Did you know that some causes of anemia are invisible?

You may not know you have bleeding from your digestive tract. This can be a result of:

- Stomach ulcers
- Growths in intestines (polyps)
- Colon cancer
- Certain medications
- Other diseases of the digestive tract

Anemia is often the first symptom of these conditions so it should be taken seriously. If you feel you don't fit in any of the previous categories, or just want to rule out these possibilities, make an appointment with your physician without delay.

You should see your doctor if your hematocrit is low and you:

- donate less than three times per year,
- are a non-menstruating woman of any age with a hematocrit below 36%,
- a man with a hematocrit less than 38%, and
- are not already under the care of a physician for one of the conditions listed above.

What can I do to increase my low hematocrit?

Increasing the consumption of red meat (liver in particular), fish and shellfish (oysters, clams, shrimp, and scallops), dried fruit (apricots, prunes, and peaches), green leafy vegetables, beans, iron fortified breads and cereals, all rich in iron, may help. Furthermore, eating foods rich in vitamin C (citrus fruits, broccoli and tomatoes) helps in iron absorption.

Some foods block the absorption of iron, like coffee, tea, milk, fiber, and soy protein. Avoiding such foods would enable more iron from the diet and/or iron supplements to be absorbed. Lastly, over the counter iron supplements are readily available. The most common side effect of these supplements is upset stomach. However, because multiple other causes of low hematocrit are also possible, donors may want to see their doctors to determine the exact cause of low hematocrit before taking iron pills or vitamins with iron.

AND ANEMIA