

DONATE BLOOD. SAVE A LIFE.

Learn about this safe, easy process.

Every 2 seconds, someone in the United States needs blood, and a single donation can save lives. Patients in need rely on people who give blood. Blood donors are true heroes.

Why is blood so important?

Healthy adults have about 5 to 6 liters of blood circulating throughout their body. Each drop of blood contains red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. Blood helps deliver oxygen and nutrients to cells while moving waste to the liver and kidneys. This ongoing process keeps us alive.

Who needs a blood donation?

Patients may need blood to address:

- Heavy bleeding
- Surgery
- Trauma
- Organ transplant
- Cancer and treatment
- Infectious diseases
- Blood diseases
- Gastrointestinal diseases

There's always a need for blood.

Donating blood is always important because blood has a short shelf life and there is constantly a need. For example, platelets, which help with clotting and can benefit people who don't have enough, can be stored for only 5 to 7 days. Red blood cells, which can benefit people with diseases that cause anemia, can be stored for only up to 42 days.



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www.nhlbi.nih.gov/blood

How do patients receive donated blood?

All donated blood is carefully tested and then stored and shipped so it is ready for use. Blood transfusions transfer healthy donor blood to patients through an IV line inserted into a blood vessel. Transfusions may contain whole units of blood or be separated into components — like red blood cells, platelets, or plasma — based on each patient's needs.

How does blood type factor into donations?

Blood types relate to the presence or absence of certain antigens — substances that can trigger an immune response if they are foreign to the body. Some antigens on transfused blood cells can cause your immune system to attack the transfused blood if those antigens are foreign to your body. This is why it is very important that transfused blood — and its major antigens — be carefully matched with the blood of the person being transfused.

Blood types are passed genetically from your parents. Most blood types fall into one of eight major groups (O+, O-, A+, A-, B+, B-, AB+, AB-), depending on whether your blood cells have the A and B antigens and the Rh factor. Hundreds more minor antigens exist, and the presence or absence of those creates what is called a rare blood type. This happens when your blood lacks the antigens that 99% of people are positive for. Certain blood types, especially rare blood types, are unique to specific racial and ethnic groups. For patients with a rare blood type, it is vital that donor diversity match patient diversity to ensure a better match with the transfused blood. [Learn more about blood types and what they mean for you from the American Red Cross.](#)

Who can donate blood?

Most people can donate blood. Volunteers should be in good health, be at least 16 or 17 years old (depending on the state they live in), and weigh at least 110 pounds. They should also have healthy levels of hemoglobin, which is a protein that carries oxygen in the blood.

Where can I donate blood?

Find a [blood donation center](#) near you.



Only 3% of Americans give blood each year.

If you are healthy and eligible, please consider donating blood regularly because blood is always needed.

Your donation can help save lives.

Learn more at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/blood/donation.



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