NHS
National Services Scotland



Low haemoglobin and blood donation

SCOTTISH NATIONAL BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE®

Introduction

Thank you for coming to give blood today. We are sorry that we could not take a donation from you this time. This is because your haemoglobin level was lower than our minimum level for donation.

What is haemoglobin?

Haemoglobin is a protein that carries oxygen around the body. It gives blood its red colour.

Haemoglobin levels

We need to make sure your haemoglobin level is within the limits that we set for donation. We do this by testing a small sample of your blood before you donate.

Men tend to have higher levels of haemoglobin than women. To give **blood**, a man needs to have a haemoglobin level between 135 g/L and 180g/L. A woman needs to have a haemoglobin level between 125 g/L and 165 g/L.

To give **plasma**, a man needs to have a haemoglobin level between 130 g/L and 180g/L. A woman needs to have a haemoglobin level between 120 g/L and 165 g/L.

Blood donation removes red cells which contain haemoglobin. A key component of haemoglobin is iron, so when you donate blood you lose some iron. In most cases this can be restored before the next donation.

My haemoglobin was too low to donate. What does this mean?

Haemoglobin levels vary from person to person. We do not want to leave you with too

little haemoglobin after giving blood, so we deliberately set the level for donation higher than the level you need to be healthy. This makes sure that it doesn't fall to unsafe levels after donation. As a result, some people are not able to donate even though they have a healthy haemoglobin level. Low iron can leave you feeling tired and may affect your concentration.

Recent pregnancy and menstrual periods can sometimes be reasons for anaemia or low haemoglobin. Occasionally our tests show that someone is anaemic for this or other reasons. If this is the case for you, our staff will advise you to speak to your own doctor.

Why did you do two tests?

The fingerprick test is a quick way to check your haemoglobin is at the right level to give blood. If this test gives a low reading, we ask for a second sample, taken directly from a vein, to confirm the result.

When can I give blood again?

Our staff will tell you when you can come back to give blood again. If you have a healthy haemoglobin level, we will ask you to wait six months. If your haemoglobin is lower, we will ask you to wait twelve months.

If your haemoglobin levels are too low to give blood three times in a row, we will ask you not to donate at present.

How do I keep my haemoglobin levels healthy?

Our bodies need iron to make haemoglobin, so it is important to have enough iron in your diet.

Diet is a good way to raise your haemoglobin levels before you donate again.

Foods rich in iron:

- **Lean red meat**
- **Oily fish**
- **Eggs**
- **Fortified breakfast cereals**
- **Pulses and beans (including canned baked beans)**
- **Nuts (including peanut butter)**
- **Whole grains such as brown rice**
- **Dried fruit, especially apricots, raisins and prunes**
- **Tofu**
- **Leafy green vegetables, especially curly kale, watercress and broccoli**

We absorb iron best from meat or fish, but it is possible to get enough iron from a well-balanced vegetarian or vegan diet.

Vitamin C may help us to absorb iron. Having a glass of orange juice with a meal, or eating vegetables rich in vitamin C (eg broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green peppers, or potatoes) may help us get the most of the iron in our food.

It is better not to drink tea or coffee around mealtimes as these reduce the amount of iron we absorb.

Visit **www.foodstandards.gov.scot** for more information about a healthy diet. For advice about anaemia visit NHS Inform at **www.nhsinform.scot**

Donor name: _____

Donor number: _____

Date: _____

Your haemoglobin was measured today using a point-of-care device.

Your haemoglobin result is_____ g/L

This result is from a:

☐ Capillary sample ☐ Venous sample

What happens next

☐ This result is a normal result. Your haemoglobin level is high enough to be healthy but not enough for us to take a donation. You do not need to see your GP unless you have any other concerns about your health, or this result is unusual for you. Please contact us if you would like to discuss this further. You will need to wait at least six months before coming back to give blood.

☐ This result is lower than normal. Please show this result to your GP who will decide if you need further tests and/or treatment. You will need to wait one year before coming back to give blood.

Staff member name:

_____

Signature: _____

Additional comments:

_____

_____

Contact us

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