

1. Haemoglobin and iron

Every time you give blood or platelets we check your haemoglobin level. Haemoglobin, or 'Hb', is a protein found in the red blood cells that carries oxygen around your body and gives blood its red colour. Hb levels vary from person to person; men usually have higher levels than women.



To ensure your safety we need the Hb to be at least **12.5g/dl for women** and **13.5g/dl for men** prior to donation. We set a fairly high 'cut-off' level because we want to be sure that your Hb will not drop below normal after your donation. If you donate platelets you lose a certain number of red cells each time also, and after a number of donations your iron stores and Hb can drop.

2. What if I've been deferred?

If you were not allowed to donate blood because of a low Hb, you are not alone. We

encourage you to follow the tips below to boost your Hb and to retry to donate as instructed by the medical doctor. We hope that next time you come to give blood your Hb will be above our 'cut-off' level and that you will be able to donate.

3. Why Hb levels might be too low to donate

The commonest reasons are:

- ♦ Variation between people – some of us just normally have a 'low-ish' level.
- ♦ Iron – we all need iron to make Hb. If your iron stores are low, the Hb may fall below normal (or below the donation level).
- ♦ Testing procedure – while we take great care with our test on the session, occasionally it underestimates the amount of Hb in the blood.
- ♦ Menstruation – women who have heavy menses tend to have a lower Hb level.
- ♦ Blood donation – while every precaution is taken to ensure you remain well

after your donations, very regular blood donors might occasionally experience a drop in their iron level since this is found in the donation itself.

4. More about iron

As iron is found in a variety of foods, you can usually get enough from a balanced diet. The major sources of iron are meat and meat-based foods, cereals and vegetables.



Although iron from non-meat sources is more difficult for the body to absorb, people following a well-balanced vegetarian or vegan diet should get enough iron in their diet.

A full list of iron rich foods will be provided to you separately by the medical doctor.

5. Vitamin C

Vitamin C helps you to absorb more iron. So in order to get the most from the food you eat, have vitamin C rich foods or drinks with your meals: for example fresh fruits and vegetables, or drinks such as fresh orange juice.

Avoid drinking tea, coffee or milk/milk products just before, after or with meals as this may reduce the absorption of iron from foods.

IRON BUSTERS

- ✗ caffeinated beverages
- ✗ chocolate
- ✗ an excess of high-fibre foods
- ✗ some medications like antacids or phosphate salts

HIGH-IRON FOODS

- ✓ lean red meat, turkey or chicken
- ✓ fish (including mackerel, sardines, salmon, herring and shellfish)
- ✓ eggs
- ✓ breakfast cereals (fortified with iron)
- ✓ pulses and beans (in particular baked beans, chickpeas and lentils)
- ✓ nuts (including peanut butter)
- ✓ brown rice
- ✓ tofu
- ✓ bread (especially wholemeal or brown breads)
- ✓ leafy green vegetables (especially curly kale, watercress, broccoli and spinach)
- ✓ dried fruit (especially apricots, raisins and prunes)

6. Further information

If you would like more information about how to better your Hb status, please contact us:

**Blood Donation Centre, St. Luke's Square,
G'Mangia (open daily 08:00 – 18:00)**

Telephone: (+356) 21234767 / 79307307

Website: <http://www.blood.gov.mt>

Email: customer-care.nbts@gov.mt

Facebook: www.facebook.com/bloodmalta



Iron and You

Why having good iron stores is important to blood donors