



Men and Women Can Help in Different Ways

The difference between the way the body works in men and women also translates into the diverse approaches that they can take when deciding to contribute to patients' well-being by donating blood. The minimum required amount of red blood cells that make a person eligible to donate blood is the same, whether the donor is male or female. This is helpful in several ways: it insures that patients receive a sufficient amount of life saving, oxygen-carrying red blood cells, and also gives female donors a greater "cushion" to avoid iron depletion. Each donation of a pint of blood results in the loss of approximately 250 mg of iron. Iron is needed to make the red pigment in the blood cells that transports oxygen to all the cells in our body. Under normal circumstances, and with proper, balanced diet, the iron loss is replenished within three to four weeks. A significant proportion of the ingredients in processed food are 'enriched' with iron. And fresh fruits, vegetables and meats and eggs also provide a significant source of iron.

However, regular blood donation may be taxing for the iron reserves of some women during their menstruating years. The average female loses the cumulative equivalent of one pint of blood yearly through her menstrual cycles. As a result, some females are not able to donate more than two or three times a year during their pre-menopausal years. Pregnancies are also a factor in the depletion of iron reserves. But for those committed to help patients in need, platelet donations by a process called apheresis, allows a person to donate platelets – tiny blood corpuscles that allow blood to clot. Platelet transfusions are needed by patients who have open heart surgery, chemotherapy to treat malignancies, and trauma requiring massive transfusion. The process is very similar to a regular blood donation, but a special machine separates the life-saving Platelets from the other constituents of the donor's blood and returns the rest (including the red blood cells) back to the donor. That minimizes iron loss, allowing for donations to take place as frequently as every other week!

Conversely, men can be benefited by the iron loss, as an oversupply of this metal may increase the incidence of heart disease according to some long term studies. And because of their larger body mass, men may even be able to donate both platelets and red blood cells simultaneously, using the same apheresis technology, modified for that purpose.

The bottom line is that healthy women and men can give the gift of life to patients in need that depend on their generosity. Remember to donate blood regularly!

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Florida Blood Services is an independent, not for profit, community based healthcare provider for the blood needs of patients at medical facilities throughout the Tampa Bay area. Over 800 volunteer donations are required daily. For further information or donation locations, call 1-800-68-BLOOD (25663) or visit www.fbsblood.org