



# Hemo – WHAT???

You were not able to donate blood today because the hemoglobin content in your blood was below our required level. While your hemoglobin was below the level we use, it may be normal for you, especially if you are a woman.

Hemoglobin is a protein that contains iron. It carries oxygen to the body tissues and gives blood its red color. The most frequent cause of low hemoglobin, **but not the only one**, is not having enough iron. This is called iron deficiency. In adults, iron deficiency develops when too little iron is absorbed from food to replace the iron lost because of heavy menstrual flow, gastrointestinal disease, surgery, or too frequent blood donations.

The amount of iron absorbed from food depends on how the iron is “packaged” in the food. It also depends on the combinations of food you eat, because some foods, beverages and mineral can prevent the body from absorbing iron. Others help the body absorb it. Someone who is iron-deficient will absorb more iron than someone whose iron level is normal.

Iron is best absorbed from animal foods: red meat, veal, pork, chicken, turkey, and seafood—but not from milk or dairy products.

The calcium in milk and other dairy products can also block iron absorption. For example, it is better to drink orange juice with your hamburger, then wait a couple of hours before drinking milk.

It can take several months to build up your hemoglobin with diet alone. Iron deficiency can be corrected faster with medication such as ferrous sulfate. However **medication for iron deficiency should only be taken with a doctor’s advice**. The doctor will want to find out if you have iron deficiency and what’s causing it before deciding how to treat you.

## Facts About Food

These foods contain iron:

- Raisins
- Meat (liver is the highest)
- Fish
- Poultry
- Eggs (yolk)
- Legumes (peas and beans)
- Whole grain bread

These foods will help your body absorb iron:

- Citrus fruits and drinks
- Fresh fruits (e.g. apples, peaches, pears)
- Fresh or lightly cooked vegetables

These may make it hard for your body to absorb iron:

- Tea, coffee
- High bran foods
- Whole wheat bakery products
- Calcium supplements
- Antacids

(While some of these are part of a balanced diet, you can help your body absorb iron by eating them at a separate meal.)

Although you weren’t able to donate today, we invite you to come back again. Low hemoglobin is usually a temporary deferral. We’ll be happy to check your hemoglobin again to see if your hemoglobin content has increased so you can donate.

Thanks for trying!

**United Blood Services**  
www.UnitedBloodServices.org

