Who can be a blood donor? [1]

1) Dear Alice,

What qualifications do you have to have in order to be a blood donor?

2) Dear Alice,

I want to donate blood (O-!). I have donated for many years before I had seeds implanted for prostate cancer (wasn't metastasized then, or now), and am taking blood pressure pills. Now, is it all right for me to donate? Thank you.

Answer

Dear Readers,

Your commitment to donating blood to help others is respectable and much appreciated by the medical professionals and recipients who need blood products. In general, blood donors must be healthy, over 17 years old, weigh over 110 pounds, and not have donated blood within the last eight weeks. However, there are many conditions which may affect a person's ability to donate blood, so it's best to check with blood donation programs in your area regarding specific requirements. For example, the New York Blood Center [2], American Red Cross [3], and America's Blood Centers [4] websites contain information on eligibility, medical conditions, what to expect when donating, and locations in your area. Blood donation requirements change from time to time, so it's best to check with the organization collecting donations about their policies.
Even for those who meet the basic eligibility criteria, there may be a number of reasons they are deferred. For example, anyone with an acute illness such as the flu or a cold may be asked to return at a later date when they’re no longer ill. Taking certain health conditions and medications may prevent someone from donating, as could low iron. Iron is necessary to help the body replenish the donated blood cells, so low levels of iron may make this difficult for the body. Finally, if someone has traveled to or lived in certain countries, they may be temporarily or permanently ineligible from donating blood. For example, those who have spent significant periods of time in locations where variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease was found are unable to donate, as there isn't currently a test to identify it and it may be spread through blood transfusions.

While there may be some variation between organizations, most blood donation organizations will have some common processes. Similar to visits to other health care providers, they will consist of registering and providing a health history. After that, they will set up the donation, which can have different processes and take varying lengths of time depending on what type of donation you’re making (such as whole blood versus a platelet donation). Many places will ask that you wait a bit before leaving after donating and eat a snack and have some juice to replace the lost fluids from the donation. If you’d like to learn more, you may want to check out American Red Cross — Donation Process and America's Blood Centers — Blood Donation 101.

Reader 2, the American Red Cross web site has an eligibility requirements for donating blood section, including guidelines for medical conditions and medications. It’s wise to check this out before a visit to a blood donation center. In case you're still unclear, discussing your interest in blood donation with your health care provider could be of benefit, especially if they have any concerns about you donating. Searching through these detailed documents may help you to determine your eligibility status.

Again, your regard for the well-being of others is commendable. All the best to you as you give of yourself to others,

Alice!

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