



This won't hurt a bit

A relatively painless personal account of blood donation

The process of donating blood isn't as arduous as you might think. Though the experience will differ depending on your health, your blood pressure, the size of your veins, the amount of fluid and food you've consumed prior to donating, and a myriad of other technical factors that are mostly out of your control, the whole process usually only takes about 60 minutes.

Still, the thought of donating blood can be a bit off-putting for some people, so your intrepid Gateway news editors, Natalie Climenhaga and Ryan Heise (both returning donors), ventured to Canadian Blood Services' (CBS) main location just south of the University hospital to donate blood last Saturday, as well as to get a refresher course in what it's like to give what's in you to give.

First things first: make an appointment. While CBS can accommodate a certain amount of walk-ins, making an appointment will guarantee a spot for you and make the process that much easier and quicker, so you're not sitting around a waiting room all afternoon.

When you arrive, you'll check in with a receptionist and receive an information booklet and number. The booklet outlines certain factors that may put you at risk for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and other blood-borne viruses. It also clarifies what CBS considers as sex (note: it's different than Bill Clinton's version). If you're a first-timer, giving the booklet a quick perusal while you wait for the first available nurse will be beneficial.

The fun begins when a nursing station opens up. After pulling up your information on a computer, the nurse will prick your finger, draw a small sample of blood, and drop it into a copper-sulfate solution to test your metal (that is, your iron level). While neither of us eat much meat, both of our samples plummeted to the bottom of the vile, making us ideal candidates.

After that, you'll complete a short questionnaire regarding any previous blood transfusions and out-of-country travel, as well as your sexual history. The questions are relatively straightforward, save for a few oddities, such as whether or not you've "taken care of or handled monkeys

or their body fluids." While CBS does test your blood for viruses, this survey helps them to know if there is anything that makes you more at risk for certain afflictions.

Following this quiz, you'll enter a private room with another nurse. Here, they will ask you more personal questions regarding your sexual history and drug use. While some of the questions—"Have you ever had sex for drugs?", "Have you ever had sex with someone whose sexual history you don't know?", and "Have you ever taken drugs via a needle, even once?", for example—might make you a tad sheepish, CBS needs to thoroughly screen all donors for safety reasons.

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A final precaution that they take is allowing you to privately place a discrete "yes" or "no" barcode on your donation. This measure is taken in case you were uncomfortable answering some of the questions truthfully and are still worried your blood might be unsafe. If you place the "no" sticker on your papers, you will still go through the donation process, but the barcode will be scanned, and CBS will know not to use your blood afterwards. It still won't be a waste, either, as blood unfit for donation is still used by CBS for testing purposes.

After this interview, the show really gets rolling. You'll hop up into a comfy, dentist-esque chair and yet another nurse will come prep you for donation. The

area on your arm where the needle will be inserted is cleaned, and your bag is prepped. Now comes the part you've all been waiting for (and probably dreading): the needle.

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This is also the point at which some donors get rejected: some people's veins collapse due to the drop in pressure, or else they become too lightheaded too continue.

How long it takes to fill your 610g bag is, again, contingent on many personal factors, and everyone will have a slightly different experience; while Ryan's blood flowed like Niagara Falls, taking around five minutes to complete, Natalie's came much slower, and even came close to stopping a few times. While the nurse was ready to end the procedure on a couple of occasions, Natalie eventually made it to 610g after about 15 minutes. To expedite this part of the procedure, make sure you're very hydrated prior to donating.

During your drain, a nurse will take a few samples of your blood for testing. You can't get these back—we asked. After you're done, the needle will be removed painlessly, and you'll need to stay put for a tedious five minutes. Tedious because once it's over, it's open season on free cookies, juice, coffee, tea, and even homemade soup to get your bloodsugar levels back up after donating. That's right: you're supposed to eat sugary foods afterwards—pretty much the only chance you'll ever get to say that.

Once you've sufficiently gorged yourself on Oreos and apple juice, you're pretty much done. If all goes well, the whole event should take just under an hour.

Then you can sit back, enjoy the thought that you may have helped save a life, and get ready for your next appointment 56 days later, when you can do it all again.

Basic Eligibility for Blood Donation

Identification

Identification with full name and signature, or full name and photograph is required. For returning donors, your CBS-issued donor card is all you need.

Age

Between 17th and 71st birthday (regular donor), or between 17th and 61st birthday (first-time donor). To continue donating after their 71st birthday, regular donors should contact Canadian Blood Services prior to donation for further eligibility information.

Weight

At least 50kg (110lbs).

Frequency of Donation

Minimum interval between blood donations is 56 days.

Health

In general, good health and feeling well is required. You should have had something to eat and adequate sleep beforehand. You must also meet hemoglobin (iron) requirements (test done at the clinic).

Donating blood does not put you at risk of disease. All needles are sterile, and used only before being discarded. The usual blood collection—a "unit"—is about half a litre, or one pint. Your body soon replaces all the blood you donate.

Source: www.bloodservices.ca