



GIVE BLOOD & GET HEALTHIER

Fewer than 10% of us donate blood each year. If you've been sitting this one out, consider this: There's something in it for you, too.

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photographed by **LEVI BROWN**

You've got about 10 pints of precious blood doing laps around your circulatory system, but we're here to suggest that you lose one. Why? It's a boon for your well-being. The simple act of giving blood is one of the quickest and easiest ways to make a difference in the lives of others, but experts say that it also offers three nice health perks for the donor.

1 STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART

Giving blood is kindhearted and potentially good for your ticker. It all comes down to iron: When you take in too much (more than 18 mg a day for women under 50, or more than 8 mg for women 50 and older), the mineral can stack up in your blood. Your body dumps excess iron during the menstrual cycle, but it's possible for too much to accumulate

Feeling Queasy?

If a fear of either blood or needles is stopping you from donating—or even wanting to read this article—hear us out before you flip the page. You just need to know how to work through that I'm-gonna-faint feeling. Some people's nervous systems overreact to stressful situations, such as being pricked. In response, their blood pressure and heart rate can suddenly dip and—*blergh*—they're feeling woozy. A technique called applied muscle tension, in which you contract and relax muscles, can help fight nausea by bumping blood pressure back up. Try it by tightening any large muscles, such as your thighs or abdominals (imagine you're doing a crunch) for 10 to 15 seconds, then releasing. Another tip: Even if you're not a needle-phobe, drink an extra 2 cups of water before the donation. When you're dehydrated, losing extra fluid in the form of blood can lead to fainting, especially if you're petite.

in postmenopausal women (as well as in middle-aged and older men). People with very high iron levels may have an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease and heart attacks. Experts aren't certain what causes the harm to the heart, but one theory is that an overload of iron can be toxic to the coronary arteries, says Jennifer Haythe, M.D., a cardiologist at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital. Donating could help lower elevated levels, possibly making for a healthier heart. Excess iron isn't a big problem for most people, and, of course, giving blood doesn't top the list of things you should do for your ticker. Tried-and-

