Iron-Rich Feast

ACTIVITY GUIDE

What is it?
The Iron-Rich Feast is a community dinner hosted in advance of a blood drive. Since giving blood requires a healthy iron level, your club can host a feast and serve iron-rich foods. This dinner will bring the community together for a fun event to promote the blood drive and help donors increase their iron levels before they donate.

How does it help?
The Iron-Rich Feast will help educate donors about how to maintain healthy iron levels and help them prepare for a successful donation. The feast will also give you the opportunity to recruit new donors for the upcoming blood drive.

Get started!
Contact your local American Red Cross chapter or Service to the Armed Forces station for guidance. They will help you with planning and will point you to useful resources. Here are the steps you can take to get started:

1. Secure a location for the feast that is suitable for a large group of people. Consider your school cafeteria, local banquet halls and recreation centers. Ask the location to sponsor the feast and allow you to use the space for free.

2. Determine the iron-rich foods you will serve at your event. In the resources section, you will find a list of iron-rich foods. Talk to local business owners and ask if they are willing to sponsor your event by providing food, drinks, plates, cups and utensils.

3. To help cover the expenses for the feast, you may want to consider charging a small fee to those who attend. If you are able to have most of the food donated, you may still choose to charge a small fee so that your club can also make a monetary donation to the Red Cross.

Want more information?
Email us!
youthinvolvement@redcross.org

To help patients regain their health, the Red Cross relies on healthy blood donors.
What's next?

Once you have the location secured and details planned, there are a few more things to do:

- Contact the donors who are scheduled to donate at the blood drive and invite them to the feast.
- Create a Facebook event and invite friends, family and community members.
- Promote the feast through your school newspaper, morning announcements, flyers and social media. Talk to your school to see if they can assist you with advertising your event through their communication channels.
- Create a takeaway recipe card that has a list of iron-rich foods that donors should eat the day before they donate. On the back of the recipe card, provide additional information about the upcoming blood drive.
- Post the blood drive schedule at the feast to help remind donors of their appointment times and have a volunteer sign up new donors. Provide interesting facts about blood donation to continue to educate your guests about the importance of blood donation.

Tips for a successful blood donation

- Eat plenty of iron-rich food between donations to replace the iron contained in red blood cells.
- Eat foods rich in Vitamin C to help your body absorb the iron you eat.
- Drink extra water and noncaffeinated beverages before and after you donate.

Contact your local Red Cross chapter for assistance. You can find chapter information at redcross.org.

SHAKE IT UP!

- Make the feast into a movie night by showing a film. Advertise your movie night to help get more people to attend.
- Encourage attendees to sign thank you cards for the blood donors. If children will be attending, you may want to provide a craft or activity. Find resources at RedCrossBlood.org/YouthResources.
- Have attendees use Twitter to tweet or post about the blood drive.
- Co-sponsor the event with another club. Have each club sign up to bring a specific iron-rich dish.

SHOW AND TELL

- Share pictures and videos of your Iron-Rich Feast by sending them to youthinvolvement@redcross.org.

RESOURCES

- Iron FAQ + How to Prepare for a Great Donation
- Learn more about being a healthy donor at RedCrossBlood.org/HealthyDonors.
How to prepare for a Great Donor Experience

The American Red Cross wants your donation to be as safe and successful as possible. The following suggestions may help you prepare for your blood donation.

**Between donations**
Give your body plenty of iron. When you donate whole blood or double red cells, your body loses some iron contained in red blood cells. Eat plenty of iron-rich food to replace these cells between donations. Foods rich in iron include:

- red meat
- fish
- poultry
- beans
- iron-fortified cereal
- broccoli
- spinach
- raisins
- prunes

Also, foods rich in Vitamin C (such as citrus fruit) help your body absorb the iron you eat. But avoid drinking tea, coffee and other caffeinated beverages with meals since caffeine can reduce iron absorption.

**Before donation**
Sleep well. Get at least eight hours of sleep the night before you plan to donate.

Eat a good breakfast or lunch. This also will help your body be well prepared for giving blood.

Maintain a nutritious, well-balanced diet with foods rich in iron and high in vitamin C.

Make sure you are feeling well.

**Day of donation**
Drink extra water and fluids before you donate to replace the volume of blood you will donate. You should continue drinking extra fluids after donation, too.

Eat the right foods. Having foods containing lean proteins or complex carbohydrates, such as bread, cereal, fruit or lean meat may make you feel more comfortable during and after donating.

Avoid fatty foods, such as hamburgers or french fries, before donating. The tests that are part of our vigorous safety screening can be affected by fatty materials that appear in your blood for several hours. When this occurs, testing cannot be performed, and we may not be able to use your blood.

Relax! Spend 10 to 15 minutes relaxing in the refreshment area. Have a drink and snack to rejuvenate yourself.

**To be eligible to donate blood you must:**
- be at least 17 years old (16 with parental permission in some states)
- meet height and weight requirements (at least 110 pounds based on height)
- be in generally good health

**Before donating you should:**
- get a good night’s sleep
- drink plenty of fluids
- eat within 2-3 hours

**Be sure to bring your:**
- donor card or a government issued photo I.D.
- parental consent form if you are a 16-year-old donor
- wear clothing with sleeves that can be raised above the elbow
Iron FAQs

To help patients in need regain their health, the Red Cross relies on healthy donors. Healthy habits, including maintaining your iron and hemoglobin levels, can also help improve your donation experience.

Learn more about being a healthy blood donor at [redcrossblood.org/healthydonors](http://redcrossblood.org/healthydonors).

How will I know if my iron level is healthy enough to donate?
Prior to donating, the Red Cross will test a droplet of your blood to measure your hemoglobin level. Hemoglobin is a protein in red blood cells that contains iron and gives blood its red color. Hemoglobin carries oxygen from your lungs to nourish all the tissues in your body.

To be healthy enough to donate, men must have a level of at least 13.0 g/dL and women must have a level of at least 12.5 g/dL. If your hemoglobin is too low, we’ll ask you to wait and try to donate another time.

What is iron and how can I keep my levels healthy?
Iron is a mineral nutrient that your body needs to function normally. You need iron to make new red blood cells to replace those lost during blood donation. Your body gets iron from your diet, which is why we encourage donors to maintain a nutritious, well-balanced diet with plenty of foods rich in iron and high in vitamin C.

What if I’m deferred for low hemoglobin?
You may be able to donate again in the future. It is normal for hemoglobin levels to fluctuate, but there are some things you can do to help boost your levels:

1. Choose foods rich in iron and create food combinations that will increase the absorption of iron:
   • the best source of iron is lean red meat
   • for non-meat meals, choose iron-rich foods such as legumes
   • include plenty of vitamin C in your diet
   • consider fortified foods, or foods with added iron such as some breakfast cereals

2. Drink tea, coffee and milk between meals instead of with meals

3. Consider eating iron rich snacks such as raisins, nuts, dates, prunes or figs

Some donors, especially those who are young or donate frequently, may want to talk with a health-care provider about taking a multivitamin with iron or iron supplement to help replace iron lost through blood donations. You can learn more about iron levels and blood donations at [redcrossblood.org/iron](http://redcrossblood.org/iron).