Interested in Donating Blood? Check Your Blood Sugar Levels First

by DANIEL SHER

Can Diabetics Donate Blood?

There are approximately 400 million people living with diabetes today. There are a lot of conflicting ideas and opinions out there, so it's no wonder that this question arises: Can diabetics donate blood?

In this article, we will cover the topic of blood donation in diabetes. Is it possible for us to donate? Are there any risks involved for us (as donors) or for those who receive the blood? Are there any precautions or restrictions that we need to think about? Read on to learn the answers to these questions and more.

Why Are Blood Donations Important?

To put it simply: donating blood can save lives. In the U.S. alone, patients need blood transfusions every two seconds. This procedure can help those who have been involved in acute injuries and require blood replacement. Blood transfusions are also used to manage blood disorders, childbirths and to assist in certain surgeries.

Blood, unfortunately, cannot be manufactured artificially. This means that patients are completely dependent on potential blood donors like you. In the time of COVID-19, blood supplies are running low. Therefore, it is important to think about whether you, as a person with diabetes, can donate and help save lives. But first:

What Are Some of the Risks Involved?

Blood donation is a relatively safe procedure for healthy diabetics to undergo. However, there are some minor side-effects that one might encounter. These include bruising from the site of the needle, dizziness, nausea or a feeling of weakness.

People who donate blood are typically given a glass of fruit juice and a snack after donating in order to combat these temporary side effects. It's important to keep in mind that these snacks may not be diabetes-friendly, and you are advised to bring your own snacks with you.

At the end of the day, the minor discomfort that may arise from this procedure is worth the potential lives that you can save by donating. So, do not let these effects dissuade you. In fact, research has even suggested that donating blood can have positive effects on people with diabetes by improving insulin sensitivity.

Will Donating Affect My Blood Sugar Levels?

People with diabetes are often concerned that donating blood will lead to a sudden drop in their blood sugar, or alternatively, a sugar spike. This is unlikely to happen as a result of the blood donation itself. Nonetheless, you should continue to monitor your blood and symptoms after the donation, as you normally would.

What about in the long run? There is some evidence to suggest that donating blood can lead to slightly inaccurate

HbA1c readings in the weeks following the donation. The HbA1c, or glycated hemoglobin test, is a measurement used by doctors to give an average blood sugar estimate over a period of several months.

When a person donates blood, the body needs to work hard and fast to replace that blood. However, this new blood is thought to be devoid of A1c. This means that taking an HbA1c test in the two months following a blood donation will give you a diluted and inaccurate picture. For this reason, it is recommended that people with diabetes wait at least four months between blood donations. However, this is due to accuracy in measurement; your blood sugar itself is not likely to be affected.

When Should a Person with Diabetes Not Donate Blood?

If your blood sugar control is in check, you should be able to donate. If your blood sugar control is somewhat erratic and your blood-glucose levels are often high, you may not be able to donate, as blood with a high sugar content does not store as well.

These days, most insulin is synthetic (not derived from an animal). For a long time, however, people with diabetes used bovine (cow) or falcine (pig) insulin. Certain hospitals will not allow you to donate blood if you have used cow-derived insulin any time since 1980. The reason for this relates to the risk of transmitting vCJD, or mad cow disease.

Recently, however, the FDA has changed their position and this requirement is no longer applicable in the U.S. According to the Red Cross, people on insulin are able to donate, as long as their sugars are well controlled. The Red Cross eligibility criteria can be accessed through the link provided.

Other standard requirements, which apply to people with or without diabetes:

- You should be in overall good health
- You should not have low body weight (110 pounds minimum)
- You should be no younger than 17 years of age (specific age requirements vary according to state)

How Can I Be Absolutely Certain That Donating is Safe for Me?

There are two straightforward strategies that you can implement in this sort of scenario if you want to attain absolute peace of mind.

First, speak to your personal endocrinologist, diabetes nurse or doctor. They will have a sense of your overall health and wellbeing, and they are well-placed to advise on whether or not donating will be safe for you.

Second, be honest during the pre-donation screening. All blood donation facilities will screen patients before taking blood. You'll need to declare any medical conditions and medications. If possible, speak to the person conducting the screening and ask them whether it is safe for you, as a diabetic, to donate.

Keeping Your Blood Sugars Within a Healthy Range

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, your healthcare provider has likely provided you with everything you need to know to keep your blood sugars within a healthy range.

As a person with diabetes, the best way to maximize your chances of being able to donate is to manage your blood-glucose to the best of your abilities. You can do this by maintaining a healthy diet, exercising frequently, self-testing and medicating when necessary, and attending all of your regular doctor visits.

Final Takeaway

Just like anyone else, people with diabetes may want to contribute to the wellbeing of our fellow humans by

donating blood. The good news is that having diabetes does not automatically preclude us from being able to donate.

Nonetheless, it is important that we maintain an open communication pathway with our doctors and treating team, so that we can be absolutely sure that donating is not going to harm us or those receiving our blood.