This won’t hurt a bit
A relatively painless personal account of blood donation

The process of donating blood may as well "hurt" as well 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, it is a mix of the pain and other technical factors that are mostly out of your control, the whole process usually only takes about 45 minutes.

Still, the thought of donating blood can be a bit off-putting for some people, so your internal warning system rears its head, something like "Today’s the day to skip out on donating and have a nice, relaxing afternoon of gardening and power-walking.

But you’ve made up your mind to do it, and at 8:30 a.m. you arrive at the Blood Services’ (CBS) main location (just south of the University hospital to donate blood last Saturday, as well as to get a refreshing shave in what’s like to give what’s in to give to those in need.

Five 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 go much easier and quicker, so you’re not sitting around 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’ve had a fever, given the booklet a quick perusal while you wait for the first available nurse will be beneficial.

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

After this, 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 been a care bear of a handful monkeys or your body fluids.

While CBS does use 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?" - may bring up a few questions for some, CBS needs to thoroughly screen all donors for safety reasons.

Having the needle inserted into your arm is indeed the most painful part of the whole procedure. But a small prick, sometimes followed by a numb sensation, is all that you’re likely to feel— and before you know it, your red gold begins to flow through the clear, surgical tubing into the bag below.

A final precaution that they take is allowing you to privately place a discrete "yes" or "no" bar code 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 units 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 chair, place your arm, and get pricked once more before your arm will come prep for donation. The arm on your arm where the needle will be inserted is cleaned, and your bag is prepped. Now comes the part you’ve been waiting for (and probably dreading): the needle.

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This is also the place at which some donors get rejected; some people’s veins collapse due to the drop in pressure, or else they become too light-headed too continue.

How long it takes to fill your 40lb 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 clacking stopping a few times. While the nurse was ready to end the procedure on a couple of occasions, Needle eventually made it to 40lb after about 15 minutes. To expedite this part of the procedure, make sure you’re fully hydrated prior to donating.

During your drink, a nurse will take a few samples of your blood for testing. You can’t get these back—we asked. After you’ve donated, the needle will be removed painlessly, and you’ll need to stay put for a restless five minutes. Excuses because once it’s over, it’s open season on free cookies, juice, coffee, tea, and even homemade soup to get your blood sugar 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.

There you are, sitting back, enjoying 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 donors), or between 17th and 61st birthday (first-time donors). 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