

Why Donate Blood?

Davina Daniels is a young mother who lives in New York. Davina has been getting blood transfusions since she was ten months old because she suffers from a genetic blood disease called sickle cell anemia. Every day she struggles with the realization that she might not get the blood she needs to survive her next sickle cell crisis. She is in constant need of blood because as her red blood cells grow, they become deformed. This deformity causes her veins to clog and eventually sends her into a life threatening emergency. The only treatment for a sickle cell crisis is an immediate blood transfusion but for some, like Davina, it's not that simple. Since she has been receiving blood transfusions from such an early age, she's developed antibodies towards different blood groups. Therefore, Davina needs a precise match to her blood type (Reyes 19).

This is a problem that many people, not just sickle cell patients, all over the world face every day. By donating blood, people like Davina would not have to worry every day about whether or not they will have the blood to survive their next crisis. People should donate blood because there is a shortage in blood banks across America, donating blood saves lives, and there are many health benefits for the donor.

There is an increasing demand for blood across the United States, yet only 5% of the eligible 37% of the United States population actually donates (Bersch 8). Because of the lack of donators there is a shortage of blood in banks across America. In her article, "Blood-donor shortage in U.S. worsens", Mary Engel stated that "some regions are in deeper trouble than others. For example, the American Red Cross Blood Services of Southern California imports 40 percent of its needs from the Midwest and rural areas in other parts of the country. An earthquake or bridge collapse could easily triple the organizations needs" (1). Basically, Engel is saying that even though there is a shortage across all of the United States, some parts are worse off than others, and this could have traumatic effects if there was ever a disaster. Blood shortages tend to be more common in large metropolitan areas because they are faster paced and have a decreased sense of community than areas like the Midwest (Engel 1). This is important to consider because more areas are becoming metropolitan-like and are moving away from the rural scene.

The shortage of blood in blood banks is also caused by the increasing number of medically advanced surgeries. According to Deborah Zabarenko, author of the article "The Nation Has a Major Blood Shortage", "The reason for the shortage is increased demand, much of it due to the increased number of complex therapies such as chemotherapy, organ transplants and heart surgeries, which require large amounts of

blood and blood products, just one liver transplant can use 120 units of donated blood." Zabarenko's point is that more people are requiring complex treatments that require substantial amounts of blood and the decreasing amount of donors are unable to keep up with this demand. In cities like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, shortage of blood has caused cancellations of elective surgeries (Zabarenko 1). These cancellations could have devastating effects on the health of these individuals.

Every two seconds someone in the United States needs blood and more than 38,000 donations are needed every day ("Blood Facts and Statistics" 1). The fact of the matter is donating blood saves lives. Like in the case of Davina Daniels, without frequent blood transfusions to manage her sickle cell anemia, the young mother of two would not survive her sickle cell crises. Unfortunately, scenarios like Davina's are the case for many individuals in the United States. Another example of a case where blood saved someone's life is that of baby Mark. At just twenty-five weeks, Beverly Gardner, went into premature labor after experiencing cramping at work. Unable to postpone her labor, Beverly gave birth to an extremely premature baby named Mark, who weighed only one pound and seven ounces. The doctors told her that Mark would need blood transfusions in order to survive. So for four long months, he received transfusions and is now a thriving young child (Reyes 20). Without the blood transfusions, baby Mark would have died. According to the American Red Cross, "one donation can help save the lives of up to three people. If you began donating blood at age 17 and donated every 56 days until you reached age 76, you would have donated 48 gallons of blood, potentially helping save more than 1,000 lives" ("Blood Facts and Statistics" 2). In other words, donating blood should not just be a onetime thing, because over time it can help save over hundreds of lives.

Along with benefiting other people, donating blood has many health benefits for the donor. In her article, "Health Benefits of Donating Blood", Carly Schuna maintained that "There are a myriad of benefits to donating blood regularly. In addition to helping save lives, getting paid time off from work and enjoying free juice and snacks after donating, there are physical benefits to being a regular donor. If you donate blood several times a year, you are likely in better physical shape than those who do not, and you have a reduced risk for several severe diseases" (1). Schuna's point is that donating blood regularly not only helps others but can significantly improve the health of the donor.

Each time a person donates blood, he or she receives a mini-physical. A trained health care worker monitors the donor's blood pressure, pulse, temperature, and hemoglobin levels. These vital signs can be important indicators of underlying diseases or health care issues and donors could be forewarned of any

future health complications.

Donating blood also lowers iron levels, which in turn can reduce the risk of heart disease. According to Schuna, "high blood iron levels have the potential to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease because iron accelerates the oxidation process of cholesterol in the body, which damages arteries. Iron levels aren't the only factor that plays a role in a person's risk of heart disease, but there are certainly no downsides to lowering blood iron levels by donating blood regularly" (1). Schuna emphasizes the fact that donating blood lowers iron levels and in turn can have positive effects on the heart and cardiovascular system. There is also an 88 percent lower risk of heart attacks and a 33 percent lower risk of severe cardiovascular problems for regular blood donors (1).

Giving blood regularly could also help lower a person's risk of cancer. Cancers such as liver, lung, colon, stomach, and throat have lowered risk in people who consistently donate blood (Schuna 1). With the increasing incidence of cancer in our society these days, this decreased risk of cancer should motivate people to donate blood.

Overall, donating blood can help a person's body function more efficiently because it allows a person's body to replenish its blood supply. According to Schuna, "when you donate blood, your body replaces the blood volume within 48 hours of donation, and all of the red blood cells you lose during donation are completely replaced within four to eight weeks. This process of replenishment can help your body stay healthy and work more efficiently and productively" (1). Essentially, Schuna proves that donating blood can help an individual maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Yet some readers may challenge my view that donating blood is as important as I claim it is. After all, many believe that donated blood is not used, it could cause infections or transmit HIV/AIDS, or that he or she will pass out. It is important to acknowledge these arguments and provide facts about these potential problems. Many people are unsure of what happens to their blood after they donate or if it even gets used. The American Red Cross maintains that all donated blood is used. After donating, the blood is stored in ice coolers until it is transported to a Red Cross center, where it then goes through processing. The processed test tubes are then sent for testing to establish the blood type and test for infectious diseases. After the donated blood is tested, it is then stored and available for shipment to hospitals 24 hours a day and 7 days a week ("What Happens to Donated Blood?" 1-2).

In addressing the concern over transmitting infections, a sterile needle is used only once for each

donor and then discarded (Bersch 12). Trained healthcare professionals insert the needle, only after sterilizing the donor's arm with iodine and wearing clean gloves throughout the entire donation. The American Red Cross also states that "all donated blood is tested for HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis and other infectious diseases before it can be released to hospitals" ("Blood Facts and Statistics 2). Basically, the American Red Cross ensures that all of the blood donated is tested and free of any infectious diseases.

For the people who are interested in donating blood but are worried that he or she will pass out, each blood drive is ran by trained professionals who know what to do if a person passes out and know how to prevent it. To prevent this dilemma, they have the donor lie down while the donation is proceeding and consistently ask if the donor is feeling lightheaded or dizzy. After the donation is finished, the donor is allowed to stay as long as he or she likes and is offered free snacks and drinks before he or she leaves the donation place.

Donating blood is a vital necessity that often gets overlooked. Because of the shortage of blood in banks across America, the use of blood in saving lives, and the health benefits for the donor, it is important that more people go out and donate. Even though there are valid arguments against it, the benefits of donating blood outweigh the risks. Remember, there is no alternative to blood, it cannot be manufactured, the only hope we have is from generous donors.

Works Cited

- Bersch, Carron. "The give and take of blood banking." *MLO: The Medical Laboratory Observer* 42.3 (2010): 8-14. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.
- "Blood Facts and Statistics." *American Red Cross*. Web. 15 Nov. 2010. <http://www.redcrossblood.org.-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>.
- Engel, Mary. "Blood-donor shortage in U.S. worsens." *The Seattle Times* 7 Sept. 2007: *The Seattle Times*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010.
- Reyes, Damaso. "The GIFT of LIFE." *New York Amsterdam News* 98.18 (2007): 19-27. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.
- Schuna, Carly. "Health Benefits Of Donating Blood | LIVESTRONG.COM." *LIVESTRONG*. N.p., 23 Mar. 2010. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.livestrong.com/article/96891-health-benefits-donating-blood/>>.
- "What Happens to Donated Blood?". *American Red Cross*. Web. 15 Nov. 2010. <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/what-happens-donated-blood>.
- Zabarenko, Deborah. "The Nation Has a Major Blood Shortage" *ABCNews.com*. 19 Sept. 2010. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=117954&page=1>>.
- Zabarenko, Deborah. "The Nation Has a Major Blood Shortage - ABC News." *ABCNews.com*. N.p., 19 Sept. 2010. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=117954&page=1>>.