

Blood talk: Keeping your body's fuel lines healthy

By Aaron Warnick

The average adult has more than a gallon of blood pumping through their body. It's generally ideal to keep that blood inside of you. If you lose too much blood, your brain doesn't have enough fuel to keep your body alive.

Your blood is like a fleet of delivery trucks. Its roads are your veins, the packages it carries are essential nutrients and oxygen. Blood is constantly making deliveries to your cells.

At the same time, it's picking up outgoing packages in the form of unwanted waste, to be taken away for disposal.

To keep the cycle moving efficiently, regular maintenance is required.

"Keeping your blood healthy is extremely important," says John Manis, MD, a hematologist at Boston Children's Hospital.

"Blood, like your skin or hair, is an organ that renews itself every few weeks to months."

The biggest factor for having healthy blood is diet. The primary nutritional resources your blood needs are iron and vitamin B12. Foods rich in iron include shellfish, spinach, legumes, quinoa and pepitas. Red meat is also an excellent source of iron, but it is high in saturated fats that increase

blood cholesterol and increases the risk of heart disease, so consume it in moderation.

Getting enough B12 can be harder. B12 is most common in meats and fish, but you can also find it in fortified cereals, eggs and dairy products. If your diet isn't supplying the nutrients your blood needs, there can be noticeable differences in how you feel.

When your blood doesn't have the ingredients to carry enough oxygen throughout your body, you can develop anemia. You might feel tired and weak or you might not be able to focus. It can also give you shortness of breath and make you dizzy. People are at high risk for anemia during menstruation, because monthly blood loss means nutrients in the blood need to be replenished more often. There are a slew of other potential symptoms and many different types of anemia, but if you don't feel right and you don't know why, it's a good reason to visit your doctor.

There are other



>> For more information on blood health, visit www.hematology.org

factors to consider for healthy blood. Your blood sugar level can affect your energy levels. Nicotine, exercise and diabetes can

have major impacts on your blood sugar. Managing blood pressure is also very important.

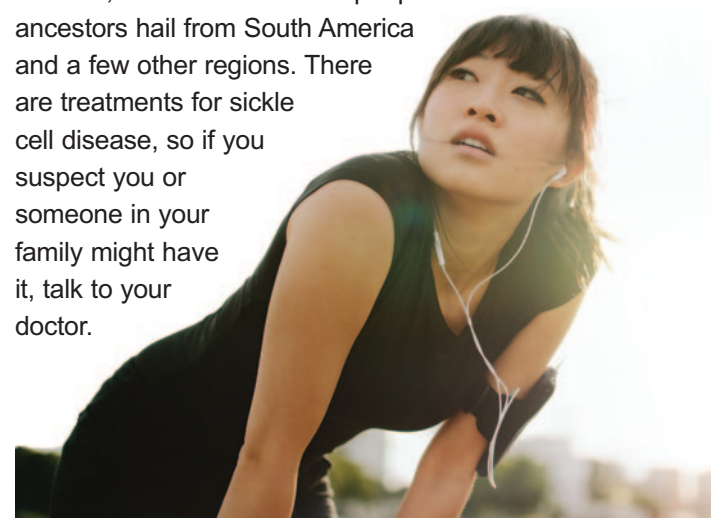


There are some reasons you should talk to your doctor about your blood, even if you're feeling

healthy. For example, if you're planning on starting a family, have heavy bleeding from menstruation or follow a strict vegan diet, it's a good idea to check in with your health care team.

Your family history is another factor for blood health. As many as 100,000 Americans have sickle cell disease, an inherited blood disorder. If you have sickle cell disease, your red blood cells have a crescent shape and become hard and sticky. The cells die sooner and can get stuck and clog the flow of your blood, causing pain, infection, eye problems and stroke.

In the U.S., sickle cell disease is most common in people of African descent, but it also occurs in people whose ancestors hail from South America and a few other regions. There are treatments for sickle cell disease, so if you suspect you or someone in your family might have it, talk to your doctor.



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