

HEALTHY LIVING

The nation's blood supply . . . In critical condition

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A minor change in medication caused major consequences for Don McLaughlin.

Last July, McLaughlin, a Dunwoody, Ga., minister, switched acid reflux medications. By September, his blood pressure had dropped to a dangerously low 60/34; he blacked out and landed in the emergency room. Six units of blood, one surgical procedure and a weeklong hospital stay remedied the bleeding ulcer that threatened to shorten the 47-year-old clergyman's life.

"It was just one of those mind-blowing experiences where I had no idea how serious it was," said McLaughlin, minister of North Atlanta Church of Christ in Dunwoody.

His normal energy level returned about two months after the transfusions and hospitalization, and he now feels "excellent," he said.

Every two seconds, because of accidents, heart surgery, organ transplants or illness, someone in America needs a blood transfusion. So, ensuring the state's blood supply is a matter of life and death for the American Red Cross.

The summer months — with students out of school and families vacationing — are particularly difficult for the Red Cross. A poor economy and fewer people giving the gift of life have severely siphoned the state's blood supply.

Since summer began, an average of 925 units (or pints) of blood have been collected daily by the Red Cross' Southern Region, well shy of the 1,200 units needed on average each day to supply more than 130 hospitals and health-care facilities. Levels of O-positive blood, the most in demand, have remained near or below a half-day's supply for most of the summer. Blood collections dwindled to only 700 units in August and hit a critical low on Aug. 12, with less than a three-hour supply



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Stan Schnitzer of Sandy Springs, Ga., donates platelets last summer. At left is collection technician John Patterson. The American Red Cross Metro Atlanta chapter reports critical levels of blood for the summer.

of O-positive on hand.

"Hospitals are telling us it's been the worst they've ever seen," said Krista Hillyer, chief medical director of the southeast division of the Red Cross. Without enough blood, elective surgeries are canceled, doctors must choose which patients to give blood, and patients with chronic diseases may have to forgo routine transfusions.

The Red Cross is also keeping a watchful eye on hurricane season as people seldom donate during inclement weather, and the heavy rain and strong winds may cause the cancellation of scheduled blood drives.

If injuries occur during the storm, the Red Cross "will do everything we can to ensure that hospitals receive the products they need," said Tracey Bryant, director of communications.

To offset the shortage, the Red Cross Southern Region now imports about 1,125 units each week. Such dependence

leaves states at the mercy of other regions to meet their needs, Hillyer said. "That is frightening," she said.

Trauma and accident victims can require up to 100 units, and a liver transplant can use 40 or more. Blood needs for scheduled procedures such as cancer treatments or surgeries can be anticipated, but transplant and trauma cases can occur at any moment and require an unknown number of units.

While it's not allowed to pay for donations, the Red Cross has increased incentives to attract donors, such as drawings for gas cards, raffles and T-shirts. It also partners with businesses, student organizations and churches to host blood drives and spread the word.

"There's no one solution," Hillyer said. "What we're relying on is people's goodwill and their sense of wanting to help their fellow man, realizing that they never know when it may be them who needs blood." ■

DONATING BLOOD

How: Call the **Lee Memorial Blood Centers** at (239) 334-5333.

Who can give? You must be at least 16, weigh at least 110 pounds and be in generally good health. The Lee Memorial Blood Centers, which was created to supply Lee Memorial hospitals, is giving free diagnostics on donated blood plus gifts and T-shirts.

Preparation: Before giving blood, get a good night's sleep and eat a well-balanced, nutritious meal. Try to eat iron-rich foods such as red meat, fish, poultry or liver, beans, iron-fortified cereals, raisins and prunes. Also, drink plenty of fluids in the 48 hours before donating.

Universal donors and recipients

Each donated unit of blood is separated into components such as red blood cells, plasma and platelets that can be transfused to different people with different needs. So each donation can be used to help save as many as three lives.

While all blood types are needed, the most common are O and A. Almost half (47 percent) of African-Americans and 53 percent of Hispanics have blood type O-positive. Thirty-seven percent of Caucasians have O-positive blood and 33 percent have A-positive. ■



Pints of blood wait in cold storage. The most-needed blood types are O and A.

HEALTHY EATING

Eat around the world for fewer calories

Chances are when you ask the initial question about dining out it's probably, "What do you feel like eating tonight?" And according to the National Restaurant Association the answer is commonly one of the big three — Asian, Mexican or Italian.

There is a terrific trend nationwide to create more authentic internationally inspired dishes, and happily they're often much lighter and healthier than the Americanized versions. One delicious case in point: Asian lettuce or cabbage leaf wraps instead of deep-fried egg rolls.

Here's a tasty travel guide to navigating three of the most popular world cuisines.

ASIAN

Whether it's the many different styles of Chinese cooking or a taste of Vietnamese or Thai cuisine, Asian menus offer a wonderful assortment of dishes with big tastes without big calories. Avoid deep-fried foods.

- Start off with soup such as hot and sour or miso soup to help curb your appetite;
- Enjoy the green tea! It's calming, fragrant, and research links it to appetite control;
- Use chopsticks! It'll slow you down. If you've yet to master the skill, it's high time you did;
- Ask that your dish be stir-fried using less oil. Each dish is usually made to order;
- Get steamed. Instead of fried pot stickers order steamed dumplings. Order steamed vegetables. If stir-fried, ask for "just a little oil please";
- Forego fried rice. Choose steamed brown rice;
- Limit how much sauce you use, since sauces are usually high in sodium;
- Read your fortune cookie for dessert. Confucius say: "It will add only 30 calories to your meal."

MEXICAN

No longer just a refried bean and cheese fest of Tex Mex, Mexican restaurants are offering more grilled entrees, an assortment of high-fiber beans and plenty of fresh salsas. — Start off with gazpacho or black bean soup (watch the sour cream garnish);

- Watch out for mindless tortilla chip munching! Count out a few chips to enjoy with the salsa, which has little or no fat;
- Go for big flavors from salsa, picante sauce, pico de gallo and salsa verde. All are made with little or no fat;
- Ask that cheese and sour cream be left off or served on the side and add a touch for flavor;
- Choose pinto beans or black beans instead of refried beans (1 cup contains 500 calories!);
- Top everything with a healthy helping of shredded lettuce and chopped tomatoes, and pour on the salsa (red or green).
- Tortilla tip: Corn tortillas contain 40 less calories than flour tortillas. Also, fajitas with grilled beef, chicken or shrimp are a good choice because you can control how much cheese or sour cream you put on each tortilla. And fish tacos with cabbage slaw are a terrific. Choose grilled fish where available.

ITALIAN

The Mediterranean diet hit the nutrition headlines because it's so heart-healthy. *But, please note that doesn't mean all the pasta you can eat!*

- Start off with minestrone soup, an Italian vegetable soup classic;
- Avoid pastas stuffed with cheese. Enjoy flavors of freshly grated Parmesan sprinkled on top;
- Be sauce-savvy. Alfredo sauce is made with butter, heavy cream and Parmesan cheese. Marinara and pomodoro tomato-based sauces are much lower in calories;
- Avoid an oil spill. Yes, olive oil is heart-healthy. But it's still all fat, and so adds significant calories. Beware the dish of olive oil for dipping your bread;
- Pass on eggplant Parmigiana — battered, fried and topped with cheese.
- Balsamic vinegar is terrific! This aged vinegar adds molto gusto (a whole lotta flavor) to salads. Italians love flavor, by the way. Take advantage of that culinary culture and seek out dishes with rosemary, basil, red peppers, artichokes, capers and lemon. ■