



ANEMIA, IRON DEFICIENCY



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An anemia caused by inadequate amounts of iron, which is required to meet the body's needs. Iron is present in all cells and has several vital functions. The anemia can affect any age. It is more common in women of childbearing age.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- There may be no symptoms. It may be diagnosed on a routine health exam.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- Pale skin, eyes, and fingernails.
- General feeling of discomfort.
- Being more sensitive to cold.
- Shortness of breath.
- Dizziness.
- Restless legs syndrome (odd sensations in the legs).

CAUSES

Iron is involved with red blood cell production. When iron stores are low, fewer red blood cells are produced and this leads to anemia.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Rapid growth spurts in children and young teens.
- Heavy menstrual bleeding.
- Pregnancy.
- Not getting enough iron in the diet.
- Internal bleeding, such as from ulcers or colon polyps.
- Problems of the body in utilizing or absorbing iron.
- Kidney disease.
- Folic acid or vitamin B12 deficiency.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Adequate iron intake with a well-balanced diet.
- Correct problems causing excess blood loss.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with treatment. It may take two months for the iron levels to return to normal. Some outcomes will also depend on the underlying cause.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Complications are rare in mild anemia.
- If the anemia is more severe, heart complications can occur. Children may have developmental problems.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and diet. Medical tests may include blood, urine, and stool studies. Other tests may be done to diagnose disorders that could be the cause of the anemia.
- Iron deficiency can be treated with iron supplements. Other treatment will depend on the underlying cause. The cause needs to be treated so the iron deficiency does not recur.
- Internal bleeding problems may require surgery.

MEDICATIONS

- Oral iron supplements (always follow your health care provider's instructions):

Take iron on an empty stomach (at least 1/2 hour before meals) for best absorption. If it upsets your stomach, take it with a small amount of food (except milk).

If you take other drugs, wait at least 2 hours after taking iron before taking them. Antacids and tetracyclines especially interfere with iron absorption.

Iron supplements may cause black bowel movements, diarrhea, or constipation.

Too much iron is dangerous. A bottle of iron tablets can poison a child. Keep iron supplements out of the reach of children.

- In some cases, the iron may be given by injection.

ACTIVITY

No limits. You may need to reduce activities until symptoms of fatigue are gone.

DIET

- Adults should limit milk to one pint a day. It interferes with iron absorption.
- Eat iron-rich foods, including meat, fish, poultry, beans, raisins, egg yolks, and leafy green vegetables.
- Increase dietary fiber to prevent constipation.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of anemia.
- Nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, severe diarrhea, or constipation occur during treatment.

