

MANAGING YOUR IRON DEFICIENCY ANEMIA

What Is Iron Deficiency Anemia?

Iron deficiency anemia occurs when the body doesn't have enough iron to make a normal supply of red blood cells.

What Causes Iron Deficiency Anemia?

The cause is usually loss of blood resulting in increased iron requirements to make more blood cells to replace the ones that are lost or having too little iron in the diet. Normally, the body saves iron. As old red blood cells break down, iron inside is reused to make new red blood cells.

Iron-rich foods are animal products such as meat, milk, and eggs. Vegetables such as spinach and broccoli are iron rich, but the intestine can't absorb them as well. In developing countries, poor nutrition is the main cause of anemia. In Europe and the United States, chronic blood loss is more often the cause of iron deficiency.

People who are vegetarians (don't eat animal products), have a poor diet, or need large amounts of iron (such as pregnant or nursing women) have greater chances of getting the disorder. Also at risk are people with celiac disease, gastric ulcers, or intestinal tumors.

What Are the Symptoms of Iron Deficiency Anemia?

Symptoms are feeling tired and dizzy and having trouble doing normal daily activities. Severe disease may cause shortness of breath and pale skin. Long-lasting disease causes sore mouth, trouble swallowing, and soft, curling fingernails.

Another symptom is craving crunchy foods or ice cubes or eating odd things such as dirt or clay (called pica).

How Is Iron Deficiency Anemia Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis by doing blood tests to measure the iron and hemoglobin content. Finding the reason for iron loss is important, especially for babies, teens, and pregnant women. Blood loss from the intestinal tract due to cancer or bleeding ulcers must be ruled out.

If the diagnosis remains unclear, the doctor may do a bone marrow test. A blood specialist will get a small sample of bone marrow from a spot near the hip and will study it with a microscope to determine the iron content and rule out other blood disorders that can cause anemia.

How Is Iron Deficiency Anemia Treated?

Treatment depends on how severe the anemia is. Usually, people need to take extra iron as pills or liquids. Iron is taken at least once daily for 3 to 6 months. Severe anemia may mean a blood transfusion. Recovery is slow. An iron supplement may be needed for several months or years; most people start feeling better in a few weeks after starting iron replacement.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Iron Deficiency Anemia

- ✓ **DO** take your iron supplement as directed by your health care provider.
- ✓ **DO** take prenatal vitamins if you're pregnant. Keep taking them if you breast-feed.
- ✓ **DO** eat a well-balanced diet with foods high in iron, such as meat, beans, and leafy green vegetables.
- ✓ **DO** watch for and report symptoms of worsening anemia. Call your health care provider if you have severe tiredness, dizziness, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have bleeding or chronic bleeding increases.

✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have abdominal pain from the iron supplement.

A lower dose or changing the supplement may help.

⊗ **DON'T** overexert yourself.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- The American Society of Hematology: Tel: (202) 776-0544; Website:
<http://www.hematology.org>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (800) 311-3435; Website:
<http://www.cdc.gov>
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center: Tel: (301)592
8573; Website: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/index.htm>

Copyright © 2021 by Elsevier, Inc.