

## **Anemia, Iron Deficiency**

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### **DESCRIPTION**

Iron deficiency anemia occurs when the iron supply in the blood is decreased. Iron carries oxygen to all the blood cells in the body. If the red blood cells do not have enough oxygen, the cells cannot function properly.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

- Tiredness and weakness
- Paleness, especially in the hands and inside the lower eyelid
- Tongue inflammation
- Fainting
- Shortness of breath
- Fast heartbeat
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Cravings for ice, paint or dirt
- Frequent infections.

### **CAUSES**

- Poor or inadequate nutrition
- Increased loss of iron through blood loss
- Heavy menstrual bleeding
- Pregnancy
- Poor absorption of dietary iron
- Abdominal disorders, such as an ulcer, intestinal and stomach disorders or tumors.

### **GENERAL MEASURES**

- Diagnosis may require a blood test of iron levels
- Blood transfusions are sometimes needed, but not very often.

### **TREATMENT**

- Consume adequate amounts of iron through a well-balanced diet
- Eat protein and iron containing foods, including meat, beans and leafy green vegetables
- Adults should limit milk to one pint a day, because milk can interfere with iron absorption
- Your health care provider may recommend iron supplements.

### **SOURCES OF IRON IN THE DIET**

- Iron-fortified breakfast cereal
- Beef liver
- Bran
- Spinach

- Kidney beans
- Prune juice.

### **MEDICATION**

- Iron supplements must be taken on an empty stomach at least 30 minutes before meals with orange juice or vitamin C. If it upsets your stomach, you may take it with a small amount of food.
- Avoid taking antacids two hours before or four hours after iron supplements. Antacids can decrease iron absorption.
- Iron supplements may also cause black bowel movements, diarrhea, stomach cramping, nausea or constipation.
- Too much iron is dangerous. Keep iron supplements out of the reach of children.
- You may need to limit your activities until symptoms of weakness are gone.
- Increase fiber in your diet to prevent constipation.

### **CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF:**

- You or a family member has signs of anemia
- You are experiencing nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, severe diarrhea or constipation during treatment.