

IRON DEFICIENCY ANEMIA

What is Iron Deficiency Anemia?

Blood is made up of millions of tiny cells called red blood cells. Each red blood cell should contain **iron**, an essential mineral that the body needs to carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Without sufficient oxygen, the body's cells cannot function normally. When there isn't enough iron in the diet, the body starts to use stored iron. Overtime, iron deficiency anemia can develop when there is not enough iron in the body to produce healthy red blood cells. Persons at risk for developing iron deficiency anemia include women, infants and children, and vegetarians.



What are the Common Causes of Iron Deficiency Anemia?

1. Blood Loss

Whenever the body loses blood, it also loses iron. Without sufficient iron in the body, iron deficiency anemia can develop. In general, women have smaller iron stores than men because they lose more from long or heavy menstrual periods. Blood loss that occurs during childbirth may also cause low iron levels in women. In men and postmenopausal women, iron deficiency anemia may be caused by internal bleeding (bleeding inside of the body) from:

- Certain types of cancer (esophagus, stomach, colon)
- A bleeding ulcer or colon polyp
- Long-term use of aspirin and other pain medications, such as (NSAID) nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (for example, ibuprofen and naproxen).

2. Poor Diet

A low intake of iron-rich foods, such as meat, fish, poultry, dark green leafy vegetables, dried beans, dried fruits, and fortified cereals and breads can lead to iron deficiency anemia. It is important to eat these foods regularly or take an iron supplement, especially during pregnancy or childhood, when the body's need for iron increases.

3. Inability to Absorb Iron

Some diseases of the gastrointestinal tract such as Celiac disease and Crohn's disease can reduce the body's ability to absorb iron.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Iron Deficiency Anemia?

Mild cases of iron deficiency anemia may show no signs or symptoms. As the condition becomes more serious, signs and symptoms may include:

- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Pale skin color, gums, nail beds
- Shortness of breath, dizziness (especially when standing up)
- Decreased appetite (especially in children)
- Headache
- Irritability
- Sore tongue
- Cracks on the side of the mouth
- Unusual cravings for strange substances (such as dirt, ice, or pure starch)

What Are the Treatments for Iron Deficiency Anemia?

1. Dietary Changes and Supplements

It is very important to eat more foods that are high in iron as mentioned above.

Additionally, vitamin C rich foods help the body to absorb iron. Good sources of vitamin C include papaya, orange, tangerine, kiwi, guava, strawberries, green pepper, broccoli, and cabbage. In mild cases, the doctor will recommend a daily multivitamin with iron. In more severe cases, the doctor will prescribe iron tablets or drops (for children).

2. Treatment of Other Underlying Diseases

If changing the diet and taking iron supplements do not improve the condition, iron deficiency anemia may be caused by internal bleeding or an inability to absorb iron. In this case, medications or surgery may be prescribed.



Severe iron-deficiency anemia may require blood transfusions, iron injections, or intravenous iron therapy.

Can Iron Deficiency Anemia Be Prevented?

Eating iron rich and vitamin C rich foods as part of a balanced diet can help prevent iron deficiency anemia. If recommended by a doctor, iron supplements may be beneficial for individuals who cannot get enough iron from their diet.

If you are experiencing signs of iron deficiency anemia, talk with your healthcare provider so that they can determine the cause and recommend the best course of action.

For More Information:

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/ida/ida_what.html