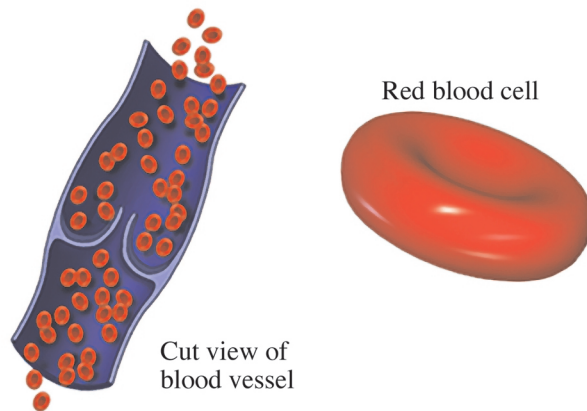




Iron-Deficiency Anemia



What is iron-deficiency anemia?

Anemia means that you do not have enough red blood cells, which carry oxygen to your body's tissues. Iron is needed to make the part of your red blood cell that carries oxygen. You may get iron-deficiency anemia if you do not get enough iron in your diet or through blood loss. Low iron is the most common cause of anemia.

You might have this type of anemia if:

- You have heavy menstrual bleeding.
- You are not getting enough iron in food. This can happen in people who need a lot of iron, such as small children, teens, and pregnant women.
- You have bleeding inside your body. This bleeding may be caused by problems such as ulcers, hemorrhoids, or cancer. This bleeding can also happen with regular aspirin use.
- You cannot absorb iron well in your body. This problem may occur if you have celiac disease or if you have had part of your stomach or small intestine removed.

To find out if you have anemia, your doctor will take some of your blood to run tests. These tests may include a complete blood count to look at your red blood cells and an iron test that shows how much iron is in your blood.

What are the symptoms?

You may not notice the symptoms of anemia, because it develops slowly and the symptoms may be mild. In fact, you may not notice them until your anemia gets worse. As anemia gets worse, you may:

- Feel weak and tire out more easily.
- Feel dizzy.
- Have headaches.
- Look very pale.
- Feel short of breath.
- Have trouble concentrating.

How is it treated?

Your doctor will probably have you take iron supplement pills to treat your anemia. Most people begin to feel better after a few days of taking iron pills. But do not stop taking the pills even if you feel better. You will need to keep taking the pills for several months to build up the iron in your body.

You may need to have iron replacement shots if you have an absorption problem and are not able to increase your iron levels by taking pills or increasing the amount of iron in your diet. You may need these shots throughout your life.

If your doctor finds the cause of your anemia, such as a bleeding ulcer, he or she will also treat that problem.

What can you do at home?

Here are some ways to care for yourself:

- If your doctor recommended iron pills, take them as directed.
 - Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your iron pills. Even after you start feeling better, it will take several months for your body to build up its supply of iron.
 - Keep iron pills out of the reach of small children. An overdose of iron can be very dangerous.
 - Iron pills may cause stomach problems, such as heartburn, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, and cramps. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids and include fruits, vegetables, and fiber in your diet each day. Iron pills can change the color of your stool to a greenish or grayish black. This is normal, but because internal bleeding can also cause dark stool, be sure to mention any color changes to your doctor.
- Eat foods rich in iron, such as red meat, shellfish, poultry, eggs, beans, raisins, whole-grain bread, and leafy green vegetables.
- If stomach bleeding caused your anemia, do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory pain relievers, such as aspirin, naproxen (Aleve), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), unless your doctor tells you to.

Helping iron pills work

- Try to take the pills on an empty stomach about 1 hour before or 2 hours after meals. But you may need to take iron with food to avoid an upset stomach.
- You can get the most benefit from iron pills if you take them with vitamin C or drink orange juice.
- Do not take antacids or drink milk or caffeine drinks (such as coffee, tea, or cola) at the same time or within 2 hours of the time that you take your iron. They can keep your body from absorbing the iron well.
- If you miss taking a pill on time, do not take a double dose of iron.
- Liquid forms of iron can stain your teeth. You can mix a dose of liquid iron in water, fruit juice, or tomato juice and then drink it with a straw so that it does not get on your teeth.

How can you prevent it?

You can prevent anemia by eating foods that contain iron every day. Iron-rich foods include meats, vegetables, and whole grains such as iron-fortified cereals.