



## Patient Information

# Iron Deficiency Anemia

Anemia occurs when red blood cells don't carry enough oxygen to body tissues. It has many causes, but most often iron deficiency is to blame.

You may be iron deficient if you do not get enough iron in your diet, if your body doesn't absorb enough of the iron you eat, or if you've had recent blood loss such as heavy menstruation or a gastrointestinal ulcer. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, as well as children and teenagers, need higher levels of iron. Iron deficiency anemia in young children can be related to lead poisoning.

### Who is at Risk?

According to the World Health Organization, iron deficiency is the most common nutritional disorder in the world. In the United States, approximately 20% of women, 50% of pregnant women and 3% of men are iron deficient and at risk for anemia. Those at particular risk include:

- menstruating women
- pregnant and breastfeeding women
- children ages 1 to 4 years
- adolescents
- long-distance runners
- strict vegetarians
- people with gastrointestinal bleeding.

### Symptoms

Iron deficiency anemia develops slowly — you can be iron deficient but not yet anemic. People with iron deficiency or mild anemia may have no symptoms at all, or they may have some of these symptoms:

- pale skin
- fatigue and weakness
- shortness of breath
- sore tongue
- brittle nails
- headache
- blue tinge to the whites of the eyes
- unusual food cravings, such as cravings for paper, clay or ice.

### Prevention and Treatment

Your nurse practitioner can test your blood to determine whether you're getting enough iron or are at risk for developing anemia. Since anemia can result from several conditions, your nurse practitioner should determine that your anemia is caused by iron deficiency before you attempt to treat it with increased iron intake.

Everyone should try to get adequate amounts of iron through diet. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends the following amounts:

- Children ages 1 to 10 years need 10 mg of iron each day.
- Boys 11 to 18 need 12 mg a day.
- Men older than 19 years need 10 mg a day.
- Girls and women ages 11 to 50 need 15 mg a day.
- Women older than 50 need 10 mg a day.
- Pregnant women need 30 mg a day.
- Breastfeeding women need 15 mg a day.

### Iron Sources

Meat, especially organ meat, contains the highest amounts of easily absorbed iron (called "heme iron"), but other foods also contain significant amounts of iron that is a bit harder for the body to absorb (called "nonheme iron"). Good sources include:

- tuna and salmon
- iron-fortified cereals
- raisins
- egg yolks
- dried beans
- whole-grain breads and brown rice
- dark, leafy green vegetables.

Eating iron-rich foods with foods containing vitamin C, such as orange juice, can help increase iron absorption. Iron absorption is decreased when iron-rich foods are consumed with foods containing calcium, such as dairy products and antacids.

Iron supplements are available for people who cannot get enough iron through diet, especially pregnant or breastfeeding women. Check with your NP before giving an iron supplement to a child.

For more information, read the following online articles: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000584.htm> and [http://www.1uphealth.com/health/iron\\_in\\_diet\\_info.html#definition](http://www.1uphealth.com/health/iron_in_diet_info.html#definition).

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