

About Anemia



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What is anemia?

You have anemia when your blood does not have enough red blood cells. Red blood cells have a protein called hemoglobin. It is needed to carry oxygen to all parts of your body. If you are anemic, you are not getting enough oxygen. You may become too tired to do the things you need and want to do. Anemia is sometimes known as “tired blood”. Women have anemia more often because they lose blood during their menstrual periods and also during childbirth.

Many different things can cause anemia. There are many different kinds of anemia:

- Iron deficiency anemia (not enough iron in your body).
- Hemolytic anemia (more red blood cells dying than are being made).
- Pernicious anemia (not enough vitamin B-12 in your body).
- Folic acid deficiency anemia (not enough folic acid in your body).
- Sickle cell anemia or thalassemia (red blood cells that are not normal).
- Anemia caused by a disease such as cancer, AIDS, and liver, kidney and Crohn’s disease.
- Anemia caused by a medicine you are taking.
- Anemia caused by being exposed to (breathing or touching) dangerous chemicals.

How will I know if I am anemic?

Your healthcare provider may want to do a blood test to check your red blood cell count and see how your red blood cells are working.

At first you may not have any signs of anemia. If the anemia gets worse, you may:

- Feel tired and weak.
- Have pale skin, gums, palms and nailbeds.
- Have fast heart beats after just a little exercise.
- Have trouble breathing after just a little exercise.
- Have pain in your chest.
- Feel dizzy and may faint (fall out).
- Have cold hands and feet.



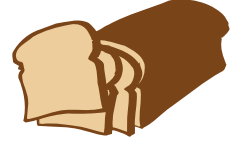
How will my anemia be treated?

The treatment for you will depend on what kind of anemia you have. Your health care provider will want to check your blood from time to time. Your healthcare provider may want you to eat foods that have a lot of iron, folic acid or vitamin B-12 in them.

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Foods that have a lot of iron in them are:

- Raisins and other dried fruits
- Sweet potatoes
- Lima, kidney and pinto beans
- Green peas
- Peanut butter and other nuts
- Eggs
- Meat
- Seafood such as clams and oysters
- Breads and cereals that are whole wheat, whole grain or have added iron
- Dark green, leafy vegetables



Foods that have a lot of folic acid in them are:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables such as avocados, beets, cantaloupe, oranges and orange juice
- Dark green, leafy vegetables such as romaine lettuce, spinach and broccoli
- Meat
- Beans and nuts
- Dairy foods such as milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, ice-cream
- Breads and cereals that are whole wheat, whole grain or have added folic acid



Foods that have a lot of vitamin B-12 in them are:

- Meat
- Dairy foods such as milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, ice-cream



What other things are helpful for me to know?

- It may be many weeks before you feel as strong or full of energy as you did before.
- If you need to take iron pills, take them when you eat to keep from having an upset stomach. Don't eat or drink dairy foods such as milk, butter, yogurt, cheese or ice-cream with your iron pills. These keep your body from taking in the iron.
- Iron pills may cause you to have stomach cramps, feel sick to your stomach, and have dark, hard bowel movements.
- If you take iron pills, be sure and keep them where children cannot find and take them.
- Do not take antacids such as Maalox and Mylanta when you take iron pills. Antacids keep your body from taking in the iron.
- Too much iron in your body can cause problems. Check with your healthcare provider before taking iron pills, and don't take more than your healthcare provider tells you.
- Sickle cell anemia runs in families, and you may want to talk to a genetic counselor about the chance of passing it on to your children.

