

Choose Wisely:

# Treating iron deficiency anemia

## What is iron deficiency anemia?

Iron deficiency anemia is when your body doesn't have enough iron to produce enough red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout your body. Without enough oxygen, your body cannot produce enough energy.

Iron deficiency anemia can be caused by other, more serious illnesses. Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor.

# Fe

### What is iron (Fe) in your body?

Your body uses iron to store and carry oxygen

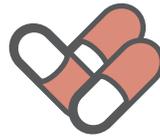
## What can cause iron deficiency anemia?



Blood loss



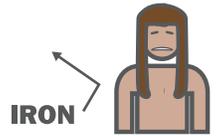
Lack of iron in the diet



Medications interfering with iron absorption



An increase in your body's need for iron



A decrease in your body's ability to absorb iron

## What are the symptoms of iron deficiency anemia?



Pale skin



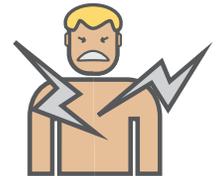
Trouble breathing



Irritability or depression



Dizziness or headaches



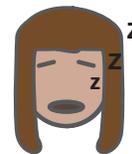
Chest pain



Decreased exercise tolerance



Craving ice, soil, chalk, or other non-foods



Fatigue

## What is the goal of treating iron deficiency anemia?

When treating Iron deficiency anemia, there are **two goals**:

1. Restore your body's iron levels & red blood cell count.
2. Find and fix the underlying cause of the iron deficiency anemia.

# How does the doctor decide which treatment is best?

When treating iron deficiency anemia, your doctor considers **all of the following information**:

## Pre-existing conditions

- Cardiac disease
- Signs of impaired cardiac function

## Symptoms

- Pale skin
- Trouble breathing
- Irritability & depression
- Dizziness or headaches
- Decreased exercise Tolerance
- Craving ice
- Fatigue
- Chest pain

## Levels

- Hemoglobin levels
- Iron stored in your body
- Amount of red blood cells in your blood

# Treatments your doctor might prescribe

## Dietary change

A dietary change is the most commonly prescribed treatment.

This involves eating foods that are high in iron.

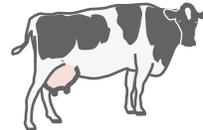
Your body absorbs more iron from meat than other types of food.

If you do not eat meat, eat a lot of iron-rich foods.

## Foods high in iron:



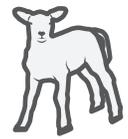
Poultry



Red meat



Seafood



Lamb



Beans



Dark, leafy greens



Iron-fortified grains



Tofu

## Oral iron supplements

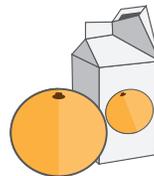
Oral iron supplements are another commonly prescribed treatment.

Talk to your doctor before you start taking oral iron supplements because your iron deficiency anemia might be caused by a more serious illness.

Possible side effects of oral iron supplements:

- Stomach pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Dark stools

## If you're taking iron supplements, consider this...



Vitamin C makes it easier for your body to absorb iron



Caffeine, milk, and antacids make it harder for your body to absorb iron when taken within 2 hours of an oral iron supplement

## Oral iron supplement schedule

**1-3 tablets taken 1-3 times per day for at least 3 months**

## Other treatments

### Intravenous (IV) iron infusion

An IV iron infusion is a safe and effective treatment where an iron medication is given slowly through an IV drip.

IV iron is faster and more effective than oral iron supplements because your body does not have to absorb the iron in the same way it does with oral iron supplements or a dietary change.



Talk to your doctor to see if the treatment is a good fit for you.

### Red blood cell transfusion

A red blood cell transfusion provides the parts of blood you need. With Iron deficiency anemia, it is usually red blood cells and hemoglobin. This treatment option is **mostly reserved for severe cases**.

While the **rate of infection is very low**, it is better to receive fewer units of blood.



Talk to your doctor if you would like to know more about this treatment.

The Canadian Society for Transfusion Medicine recommends that transfusions should be avoided when safer, effective alternatives are available.

Studies have shown that a more cautious approach to blood transfusions can decrease patient complications and improve outcomes.

## Other treatment information

### Home care tips

Call a doctor or 811 if.. stools are black like tar or have streaks of blood

- you are dizzy or lightheaded
- fatigue worsens or continues
- side effects listed previously are present
- you are not getting better as expected

### Call 911 if you:

- pass out or lose consciousness
- vomit blood or what looks like coffee grounds
- have maroon or bloody stool

### Talking to your doctor



Discuss your treatment options with your doctor



Talk to your doctor & pharmacist about what medications you are taking

### Follow-up care



After treatment, follow up with your doctor to make sure the treatment was effective



Iron deficiency anemia can be the result of a more serious issue that may require follow-up care

### Four questions to ask your doctor

1. Do I really need this test, treatment or procedure?
2. What are the downsides?
3. Are there simpler, safer options?
4. What happens if I do nothing?

Additional information:

[myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)

[choosingwiselycanada.org](http://choosingwiselycanada.org)

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