

Iron Deficiency Anemia

Anemia is a condition when your blood does not have enough healthy red blood cells. Red blood cells are important because they carry oxygen throughout your body.

Iron deficiency anemia (IDA) is when your body does not have enough iron to make hemoglobin.

Hemoglobin (Hgb) is a protein inside red blood cells that helps them carry oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body.

If you do not get enough iron from the foods you eat, or if you have **heavy menstrual bleeding** (heavy bleeding during your period), your body may not be able to make enough hemoglobin. If you do not have enough hemoglobin, IDA can develop.

Anemia is often easily treated. The treatment your healthcare provider chooses will depend on the type of anemia you have, its cause, and how severe it is.



How is Iron Deficiency Anemia Diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider can diagnose anemia by:

- checking your symptoms and doing a physical exam
- asking about your diet
- doing certain blood tests such as hemoglobin (measures how well your red blood cells carry oxygen), hematocrit (measures how many red cells are in your blood), and ferritin (measures your iron stores)
- seeing if a family member has had it

Symptoms of Anemia/IDA

- Feeling tired and/or weak
- Feeling dizzy
- Pale or yellow skin
- Increased thirst
- Moodiness
- Pica (craving non-food items like ice or dirt)
- Fast heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Cold hands and feet
- Nails that chip or break easily
- Poor appetite

Treatment for IDA

- Taking iron pills (oral iron) or multivitamins
- Eating iron-rich foods and vitamin C
- Taking iron with orange juice, or a vitamin C supplement
- Tracking how much you bleed during your period
- Having your iron and hemoglobin levels checked often by your healthcare provider
- Getting blood transfusions (only in severe cases)
- Treatment to reduce your period blood loss

Iron-Rich Foods

Beans, Chicken, Eggs,
Nuts, Red Meat, Pork, Fish,
Peas, Spinach, Strawberries,
Broccoli, Dried Fruit,
Iron-Fortified Cereals
and Breads

If IDA is not treated, it can cause complications like:

- Attention difficulties
- Tiredness
- Depression
- Higher risk for infections
- Delayed growth and development
- Enlarged heart
- Lower math scores



About Oral Iron (or Iron Pills)

The most important thing to know about taking oral iron (or iron by mouth) is how much elemental iron is in the supplement you take. Taking oral iron once a day, or even once every other day is often recommended. Taking it more than once per day does not increase the amount your body absorbs. You should avoid taking iron 1 hour BEFORE or 2 hours AFTER meals or eating foods that are high in calcium (like milk or yogurt).

Be sure to follow your healthcare provider's instructions if pills are prescribed. If pills upset your stomach or make it hard to have a bowel movement or if you have constipation, try to take them until you can speak to your provider. If you stop, your IDA could get worse. Your provider may have you take a smaller dose, or take the pills with food or vitamin C to increase absorption. For most people, taking iron by mouth works well, and should improve their hemoglobin levels in about one (1) month. Sometimes, iron may need to be given through your vein.