

ANEMIA

Anemia is a symptom of an underlying disease or disorder that is characterized by too few circulating red blood cells. This reduction in red blood cells can also lead to smaller concentrations of hemoglobin in the blood. Since oxygen is carried in the hemoglobin, the body tissues now do not receive enough oxygen and the anemic person begins to feel tired, irritable, and weak. Anemia is generally due to a sudden blood loss, destruction of red blood cells due to an underlying disorder, or insufficient production of red blood cells from bone marrow. The most commonly seen types of anemia and their treatments are:

Iron-Deficiency Anemia – Lack of iron due to blood loss (menstrual bleeding, gastrointestinal bleeding, or injury) or inadequate dietary intake. Medical treatment: Stop the bleeding, eat iron rich foods, and prescribe iron supplements.

Pernicious Anemia – Lack of *intrinsic factor* (a protein normally secreted in the stomach) necessary to absorb vitamin B₁₂ through the stomach or due to the removal of the stomach. Medical treatment: Frequent injections of vitamin B₁₂ to rebuild stores in the body; then once a month, usually for life.

Folic Acid Deficiency Anemia – Poor diet, alcoholism, and cancer can prevent the absorption of folic acid. Medical treatment: Folic acid supplements in foods and vitamins.

Hemolytic Anemia – Unusual destruction of red blood cells generally by the spleen or antibodies in the blood. Medical treatment: Removal of the spleen, steroid medications, and blood transfusions. Examples: Sickle Cell Anemia and Thalassemia

Aplastic Anemia – Bone marrow does not produce adequate number of blood cells due to unknown causes or due to exposure to toxic substances or drugs. Medical treatment: Blood transfusions, steroid medications, and bone marrow transplants.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Fatigue
- Irritability of mood
- General body weakness
- Pale skin, eyelids, gums, and nail beds
- Rapid heartbeat
- Lack of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of consciousness (with severe blood loss)

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose anemia by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory blood tests.
- Provide treatment as above and as needed based on any underlying conditions.

What *you* can do:

- Take all supplements as prescribed by your doctor.
- Take iron supplements with orange juice because Vitamin C helps with absorption.
- Increase fluids and fiber in the diet to avoid constipation due to iron.
- Eat a well balanced diet.
- DO NOT take iron with milk or milk products. (It prevents absorption.)
- Avoid alcohol if anemia is due to folic acid deficiency.
- DO NOT offer cow's milk to children before their first birthday.

Contact your doctor if symptoms worsen despite receiving treatment or if you experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation.

This material has been provided by your physician as an educational tool and is not meant to take the place of professional care. Please consult your physician for any questions, concerns or changes in your condition.