



## **ANEMIA**

### **What Is Anemia?**

While there are several different types of anemia, iron deficient anemia is the most common form of anemia, especially in women. This condition causes a decreased number of circulating red blood cells and also causes the size of the red blood cell itself to be much smaller. This results in a decrease in your body's ability to carry oxygen to all of the billions of cells that require it.

Other types of anemia are related to genetic disorders, vitamin deficiency, alcoholism, and chronic disease.

### **What Are The Symptoms Of Anemia?**

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Dizziness
- Pale gums
- Skin pallor (paleness)
- Dizziness
- Mental confusion/memory problems
- Tongue discoloration

### **Periods and Anemia**

Women who experience heavy bleeding during their periods, bleeding between periods, or women with certain conditions like uterine fibroids are at a higher risk for anemia. If you have any of the symptoms of anemia, especially coupled with dysfunctional uterine bleeding, your provider will want to do a thorough physical exam and draw labs to determine if you are anemic.

### **Pregnancy and Anemia**

Blood volume increases by 40% to meet the demands of the fetus, and dietary iron is often not enough to meet both mother and baby's demands. Your iron levels will be checked at your first prenatal visit and again at 28 weeks to make sure you aren't deficient in iron. Make sure your prenatal vitamin has iron in it; if not, talk to your provider about which prenatal vitamin you should use or if additional supplementation may be necessary. If you begin to have cravings for non-food items, like detergent, clay, or dirt, or begin to want to chew ice, this is a sign of significant iron deficiency and you must call the clinic immediately. Even though you may crave these items, do not eat them as they can be harmful to both you and your baby.

### **Iron Supplementation**

Your provider may recommend that you supplement your normal diet with over the counter iron supplementation. This supplement should be taken with vitamin C containing foods or drinks (like orange juice) as Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron more efficiently. Side effects of iron supplements include constipation, nausea, and dark colored stools. You may need a stool softener or need to increase your fiber intake while your body adjusts to the supplement.

### **What Things Decrease The Absorption Of Iron?**

Caffeine intake taken at mealtimes can reduce the absorption of iron.

### **What Are Good Sources Of Iron?**

- Vegetables: broccoli, spinach, kale, beet greens, dried peas, dried beans
- Fruits: stone fruits (apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums/prunes, ) raisins
- Meat sources: liver, lean red meats, poultry (dark meat)
- Other protein sources: eggs, peanut butter, fish
- Other sources: molasses, fortified whole grains

### **Duration of Supplementation**

You may not always have to take iron supplements. Your provider will monitor your lab results periodically to determine how long you will need to supplement with iron. It is important to take your iron every day, and only in the amounts prescribed to you by your provider. If you experience any side effects, talk to your provider, and do not discontinue taking your supplements until you've discussed discontinuing your iron with them.