

Iron deficiency anaemia

Health Condition Factsheet
Released August 2020

What is it?

Iron deficiency anaemia is a type of anaemia caused by a lack of iron. You need iron to make haemoglobin, a special protein that carries oxygen in your red blood cells. When you don't have enough haemoglobin, less oxygen is available in your body. This can make you feel tired or unwell. Iron deficiency anaemia can be caused by many different things, such as diet, medications or heavy periods.

What will my GP do now?

Your GP will try to work out what is causing your low iron levels. Your GP may:

- Recommend you include more iron-rich foods in your diet
- Refer you for blood and urine tests
- Recommend a gastroscopy and colonoscopy to check your gut health
- Recommend you have an imaging test (CT or ultrasound)
- Refer you to a specialist, if necessary

Your treatment will depend on the underlying cause. Your GP may:

- Recommend you include more iron-rich foods in your diet
- Recommend you start taking an iron supplement (unless you're having a gastroscopy and colonoscopy)
- Refer you to the emergency department if your condition is severe

What will my GP do in the future?

Your GP will want to see you regularly in the weeks following the start of treatment and may:

- Recommend blood tests to check if your treatment is working
- Ask if you've had any problems taking the iron supplement
- Refer you to a specialist, if necessary

You may need to take a supplement for six months or more, to build up your iron stores.

What questions could I ask my doctor?

- What kinds of foods are iron rich?
- Are there any foods I should avoid?
- How long will I have anaemia for?
- What symptoms do I look out for?



What can I do?

Take your iron supplement as prescribed – even if you feel well. Include iron rich foods in your diet as directed by your GP. Tell any other healthcare professional you see that you are being treated for iron deficiency anaemia.

Sometimes, iron supplements can upset your stomach. To help with this, take iron tablets on an empty stomach or with vitamin C rich fruit or fruit juice. Start with half the recommended dose, and slowly build up to a full dose.

Where can I learn more?

- **Better Health Channel** – iron deficiency: betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- **Patient Info** – iron-deficiency anaemia: patient.info

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

Health Resource Directory factsheets are endorsed by South Western Sydney PHN's Community Advisory Committee and local GPs