

## **IRON DEFICIENCY ANEMIA**

Iron deficiency anemia (IDA) generally refers to a reduction in iron stores in the body that leads to a reduced amount of red blood cells. Since iron is a necessary component in making hemoglobin that carries oxygen to the body tissues, lack of this element eventually causes anemia. IDA is usually due to some sort of blood loss such as *trauma* (injury), heavy menstrual bleeding, bleeding with urination, or gastrointestinal bleeding due to colon cancer or ulcers. It is also seen in children who lack iron supplements in their diet, in pregnant women, in adolescents undergoing growth spurts, and in premature infants. Infants who start drinking whole milk (cow's milk) prior to their first birthday can also develop IDA because this milk lacks iron.

### **Symptoms *may* include:**

- Fatigue, low energy, general body weakness
- Irritability
- Pale skin, eyelids, gums, and nail beds
- Black, tarry stools
- Inflamed tongue
- Rapid heartbeat and shortness of breath
- *Pica* (unusual food cravings)

### **What your doctor can do:**

- Diagnose the disease by asking about your symptoms, performing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory blood tests.
- Treat any underlying conditions.
- Prescribe iron supplements and recommend dietary changes to include iron-rich foods.
- Recommend blood transfusions if anemia is severe.

### **What you can do:**

- Eat a well balanced diet that includes *dark green vegetables* (asparagus, spinach, broccoli, collard greens), *organ meats* (liver), whole grain breads and cereals, dates, potatoes, prunes, apricots, fish, eggs, and cucumbers.
- Take iron supplements as directed by your doctor. Remember that iron supplements can cause constipation and stomach upset.
- Eat plenty of high fiber foods and drink adequate fluids to prevent constipation.

### **Tips for taking iron supplements:**

- Try to take it on an empty stomach to ensure adequate absorption.
- Take it with orange juice because vitamin C aids in the absorption of iron.
- Drink plenty of water and increase fiber intake (whole grains and cereals, bran) to decrease the chance of developing constipation.
- Have your child take liquid iron through a straw because it can discolor teeth.
- Stress that children rinse their mouth and brush her teeth afterwards.
- Talk to your doctor about possible interactions of iron with other medications.
- Treat iron supplements as medications and keep out of reach of children.
- Too much iron can cause toxic effects.

**Contact your doctor** if symptoms seem to worsen despite treatment.

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