

What is Iron Deficiency Anemia?

Iron deficiency anemia means that your body doesn't have the iron it needs to make enough **red blood cells**.

Having enough iron is important since red blood cells carry oxygen to the tissues in your body. With fewer red blood cells, your blood isn't able to carry enough oxygen to the cells in your body. This can make you feel weak and tired or dizzy.

Iron deficiency is the most common cause of anemia.

What causes it?

Iron deficiency anemia is caused by low levels of iron in the body. This can happen if you're not getting enough iron in your diet or if your body isn't absorbing enough iron. And it happens when you have prolonged bleeding, such as heavy menstrual bleeding or bleeding from stomach ulcers.

What are the symptoms?

You may not notice the symptoms of iron deficiency anemia. That's because it may develop slowly, and your symptoms may be mild. As anemia gets worse, you may feel weak and tired or dizzy. You may get headaches or feel short of breath.

SYMPTOMS

- Feeling weak & tired more easily
- Feeling short of breath during exercise
- Headache
- Feeling dizzy
- Looking pale
- Having a craving for ice

Other signs may include:

- Brittle fingernails and toenails
- Cracked lips
- Smooth, sore tongue
- Muscle pain during exercise
- Trouble swallowing

How is it diagnosed?

To diagnose iron deficiency anemia, your doctor will do a physical exam and ask about your health and symptoms. Your doctor will also do blood tests. These tests may include a **complete blood count** to look at your red blood cells and an iron test that shows how much iron is in your blood.

How is iron deficiency anemia treated?

To treat iron deficiency anemia, your doctor will try to find the cause of the anemia and treat that problem. Your doctor can recommend ways to increase your iron levels, such as taking iron supplement pills and eating iron-rich foods. Talk to your doctor before taking iron pills.

How can you prevent it?

Your body needs iron to make a protein called hemoglobin. This protein is found in red blood cells. It carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the cells in your body. If you don't get enough iron, your body makes fewer and smaller red blood cells. As a result, your body's cells may not get enough oxygen.

Most people can get the iron their bodies need by eating enough iron-rich foods daily, such as meats, vegetables, and whole grains. Your doctor may advise you to take an iron supplement along with eating an iron-rich diet.