

Anemia

Anemia is a blood cell condition in which there is a deficiency of oxygen-rich red blood cells. A low level of hemoglobin, the iron-rich protein that carries the oxygen in red blood cells, signals the condition. Anemia can be chronic or it can be a temporary condition caused by other health issues, including treatments for cancer, hepatitis C, and HIV/AIDS. Anemia frequently remains undiagnosed because it is an underlying condition of other health issues, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, inflammatory bowel disease, chronic kidney disease, and rheumatoid arthritis.

At risk groups include:

- Infants with inadequate amounts of iron
- Children undergoing periods of rapid growth
- Pregnant women
- Pre-menopausal women

Statistics

- One in 10 people age 65 and older has anemia.
- Half of people in nursing homes have anemia.
- Eight in 10 chemotherapy patients have severe anemia.
- Half of patients in intensive care units have anemia, and three in four extended-stay seriously ill patients are anemic.
- One in five pregnant women in the United States is anemic.
- More than three-quarters of people with AIDs have anemia.
- More than 40 percent of cardiac patients in the hospital have anemia.

Risk Factors

- Low amounts of iron and certain vitamins caused by an iron-deficient diet
- Loss of blood
- Serious illnesses, including cancer, diabetes, heart failure, HIV/AIDS, inflammatory bowel disease, kidney disease, liver disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and thyroid disease
- Long-term infections
- Family history, including sickle cell anemia and thalassemias

Symptoms

- Fatigue is the main symptom of most types of anemia
- Weakness, dizziness
- Irritability
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Chest pain, shortness of breath
- Headache
- Paleness of the skin
- Depression, loss of sexual drive, decreased work performance
- Brittle fingernails
- Cold hands and feet
- Unclear thinking, inability to concentrate
- Odd food cravings

Treatments

Anemia treatment increases the amount of oxygen in the blood. The exact treatment depends on the severity and type of the disorder, but can include:

- Dietary and nutritional changes or supplements, including intake of B12, folic acid, and vitamin C. Iron can be replenished through foods like eggs, fish, meat, poultry, beans, green-leaf vegetables, and fruits.
- Medication, such as antibiotics or hormones
- Procedures such as blood transfusions, blood and marrow stem cell transplants, or surgery

Sources: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and National Anemia Action Council



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