



SENIOR HEALTH

Anemia

WHAT IT IS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Too often, anemia in older adults is an undetected health problem. Generally referred to as “low blood count,” anemia is a decreased amount of hemoglobin in the blood. Hemoglobin, found in red blood cells, is the pigment that carries oxygen from the lungs to the body’s tissues. Anemia is a symptom, not a disease. The most common causes of anemia are deficiencies of iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12.



COMMON TYPES OF ANEMIA

► **Iron-Deficiency Anemia**

Foods that contain iron, such as meat, cereal and green, leafy vegetables, help replenish the iron that’s needed to make hemoglobin. An inadequate diet or abnormal bleeding, such as from heavy menstrual periods or disorders of the digestive tract, can cause iron-deficiency anemia.

► **Pernicious Anemia**

This type of anemia occurs when the body can’t absorb Vitamin B12. Pernicious anemia may be caused by a medical disorder, such as diabetes or the surgical removal of part of the small intestine or stomach.

► **Folic Acid Deficiency Anemia**

Poor diet is usually the cause of this type of anemia. Folic acid, which is found mainly in green, leafy vegetables and liver, can’t be stored in the body. Many people who drink large amounts of alcohol may also suffer from folic acid deficiency anemia because alcohol interferes with the metabolism of this nutrient.

TAKING CARE OF ANEMIA

Since anemia is a symptom of other disorders, it’s important to see your doctor for a proper diagnosis. Iron tablets or injections can help replenish iron reserves. For folic acid deficiency, folic acid tablets may be needed, in addition to a change in diet. For pernicious anemia, a life-long regime of Vitamin B12 injections is sometimes prescribed. Anemia can be a potentially serious problem, so it’s important to get prompt treatment, eat healthily and get plenty of rest.

SYMPTOMS OF ANEMIA

fatigue

headache

anxiety

shortness of breath

chest pain
