



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What You Need to Know About Anaemia in Adults?

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Do you know that our blood contains three different types of blood cells that perform different functions?

These are:

- **Red blood cells.** These help carry oxygen from the lungs to other parts of the body
- **White blood cells.** Help to fight infections
- **Platelets.** Help to form blood clots to prevent excess blood loss.

WHAT IS ANAEMIA?

Anaemia occurs when you do not have enough red blood cells to take oxygen around the body or when your red blood cells do not function properly.

Red blood cells contain an iron-rich protein called haemoglobin that attaches to oxygen in the lungs and carries it to tissues throughout the body. Anaemia is usually measured in the blood by the level of Haemoglobin.

The common symptoms of anaemia include:

- Tiredness or weakness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Dizziness.
- Fast or irregular heartbeat.
- Headache.
- Looking pale.

Less common symptoms or other symptoms that may be seen depending on the type or cause of anaemia include:

- Altered taste.
- Ringing in the ears.
- Chest pain.
- Cold hands and feet.
- Abnormal craving for non-food items such as clay.

The signs and symptoms of anaemia can easily be overlooked. Try to see a doctor if you suspect you have anaemia.

WHAT CAUSES ANAEMIA?

The most common cause of anaemia worldwide is the lack of iron in your blood. This is known as **iron-deficiency anaemia**. Factors that can increase your risk of developing iron deficiency anaemia include:

- Diet low in iron.
- Heavy menstrual period.
- Pregnancy.
- Poor absorption of iron due to gut (intestinal) disease.
- Prolonged bleeding from the gut (intestines).

Other causes of anaemia include:

- **Lack of certain vitamins** such as folic acid and vitamin B12.
- **Inherited diseases of the red blood cells** such as Sickle Cell Anaemia.
- **Chronic diseases or infections** such as:
 - Kidney disease.
 - Cancer.
 - Liver or thyroid disease.
 - HIV infection.
- **Medications** such as anticancer medicines.
- **Immune problems** such as autoimmune disease.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

See a primary care doctor immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- **Tiredness or weakness that has become worse.**
- **Dizziness or breathlessness.**
- **Fast heartbeat or chest pain.**
- **No improvement in your symptoms within 2-3 weeks of starting iron treatment.**

You should also see a doctor as soon as possible if you have any of the symptoms of anaemia and you are either pregnant or have a chronic disease.

HOW IS ANAEMIA DIAGNOSED?

To make a diagnosis of anaemia your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms, diet, and other risk factors.

Your doctor will check your body for signs of anaemia. If your symptoms and signs suggest anaemia, your doctor may order some blood tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Anaemia is usually diagnosed when a blood test shows a haemoglobin level less than the normal values.

Haemoglobin levels in adults are normally:

- $\geq 13\text{g/dL}$ in men.
- $\geq 12\text{g/dL}$ in women.
- $\geq 11\text{g/dL}$ in pregnant women.

Additional blood tests may be ordered depending on your condition to identify the cause of your anaemia.

WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

Once the diagnosis of anaemia is confirmed, your doctor may start treatment right away, especially if iron or vitamin deficiency anaemia is the likely cause.

In this case, your doctor will:

- Advise you about your diet and eating habits.
- Prescribe appropriate medications and discuss any potential side effects.
- Schedule follow-up appointments to monitor your treatment.

If your anaemia is very severe or has a serious underlying cause, your doctor will refer you to a hospital for specialist treatment.

HOW IS ANAEMIA TREATED?

The treatment for anaemia depends on its cause. However, two main approaches are used:

Replacement treatment: Mainly used to correct anaemia caused by the deficiency of iron, vitamins, or minerals. These include:

- **Iron medicines** such as oral iron tablets and injections are used to treat anaemia caused by lack of iron.
- **Vitamin supplements** such as vitamin B-12 injections and folic acid tablets are used to treat anaemia caused by lack of these vitamins.
- **Hormone medicines**, for example, erythropoietin injections are commonly used to treat anaemia caused by a long-standing disease such as chronic kidney disease, to stimulate the bone marrow to produce more red blood cells.
- **Blood transfusion** may be used to treat very serious cases of anaemia.

Treatment of the underlying cause of anaemia. These include medicines such as:

- Steroids for treating anaemia caused by an immune problem.
- Antibiotics for treating infections that cause anaemia.
- Chemotherapy for cancer treatment.
- Surgery to correct a bleeding problem or treat anaemia due to mechanical red cells destruction such as abnormal heart valves.

Discuss with your doctor to determine the best treatment option for your anaemia.

FOLLOW UP

If you have anaemia, you need to see your doctor regularly for check-ups during treatment.

During these follow-up visits, you can discuss your medications with your doctor.

Your doctor may order some follow-up blood tests to assess your response to the treatment.

Regular check-ups allow for monitoring of any underlying health condition that is associated with your anaemia and give an opportunity for health counselling and advice on how to further prevent anaemia.

Always discuss with your doctor before taking any alternative medicine, herbal preparation, or over-the-counter medicines as they may react with prescribed medicines.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on Anaemia in Adults can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) Qatar.

The guideline is available for public on MOPH website:

www.moph.gov.qa



HOW CAN ANAEMIA BE PREVENTED?

Anaemia caused by iron or vitamin deficiencies can be prevented by:

Eating healthy foods including:

- **Iron-rich foods** such as beef, dark green leafy vegetables, dried fruits, and nuts.
- **Foods with a high level of vitamin B-12** such as meat and dairy.
- **Foods rich in folic acid** such as green vegetables, and fortified cereals.
- **Daily multivitamin** can also help.

IMPORTANT TIP

Taking excess iron supplements can be bad for your health, especially in elderly. Older adults should avoid taking iron pills unless prescribed by a doctor.