



Iron Deficiency Anemia-Adults

What is iron deficiency anemia?

Iron is a mineral that plays an important role in the body. It helps make hemoglobin which is an iron-containing protein in red blood cells that transports oxygen around the body. It is also needed to develop blood cells. The Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA) for iron for adult females age 19-50 is 18 mg. For female age 51 and over, the iron requirement decreases to 8 mg/day. For males age 20 and over, the RDA for iron is 8 mg.

If your body is not getting enough iron, your hemoglobin will be low. This is measured by a simple blood test. When your hemoglobin is below normal range, you have anemia. Most people can be anemic and not even know it. Men who are iron deficient need to be evaluated for possible causes. Iron deficiency in males is usually due to short or long term abnormal blood loss, or in rare cases, due to nutritional deficiency, surgical or disease changes in the small bowel and/or colon, or conditions they are born with. Men have to be careful taking iron supplements because they can become iron toxic or overloaded. Menstruating females need periodic iron supplementation, because the usual cause of their iron deficiency is due to blood loss during their periods.

Symptoms of iron-deficiency anemia include:

- Abnormal paleness or lack of color of the skin
- Irritability
- Lack of energy or tiring easily (fatigue)
- Increased heart rate (tachycardia)
- Sore or swollen tongue
- Enlarged spleen
- A desire to eat peculiar substances such as dirt, or ice. This practice is called pica.

The symptoms may resemble other blood conditions so always consult your health care provider for a diagnosis.

How do you prevent iron deficiency anemia?

Iron is found in the foods we eat. A balanced diet with iron-rich foods helps prevent iron deficiency. Foods rich in iron include red meat, seafood, poultry and eggs. Meat sources of iron are easily absorbed by your body. Plant-based foods are also good sources of iron although they're less easily absorbed. Among the best plant sources are iron-fortified cereals, breads and pastas. Beans and peas, dark leafy vegetables such as spinach, and raisins, nuts and seeds also contain iron. Vitamin C in citrus juices like orange juice, helps your body better absorb dietary iron from both animal and plant sources.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit www.myguilford.com