



Iron Deficiency Anemia-Children

What is it?

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 children birth to age 11 is 10 mg/day. For children ages 12-19, the iron requirement increases to 12 mg/day for males and 15 mg/day for females.

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. Children with iron deficiency anemia will sometimes have a short attention span. If the anemia is more severe, children can show signs of sluggishness, irritability, poor appetite and poor growth. Teenagers who are anemic will sometimes complain of being tired and weak and experience headaches and/or dizziness.

How to prevent it?

Iron is found in several of the foods we may eat. A balanced diet with iron-rich foods helps prevent iron deficiency. Infants who are breastfed receive enough iron from breast milk. Iron from breast milk is very well absorbed. Infants who are bottle-fed receive enough iron from their formula. Infant cereal is another source of iron and both breast and bottle-fed infants benefit from the addition of cereal to the diet around six months of age. Older children who are anemic, especially toddlers and preschoolers, should have no more than 16 ounces of milk a day to make room for iron-rich foods in the diet. Examples of foods high in iron are: egg yolks, liver, liver pudding, turkey, red meat, peanut butter, dried fruit (raisins, prunes, peaches, apricots), nuts, beans (red kidney, pinto, lima) and whole grain and enriched breads and cereals.

Your child's health care provider may also recommend some liquid iron for your young child (or tablets for older children). To avoid stomach upset, iron should be taken with meals. Liquid iron can be mixed with a small amount of water or juice (**not milk**). While on iron, the child's bowel movements may be dark. Liquid iron can also cause temporary staining of the teeth.

Please be certain your child takes all of his/her iron as directed and returns for any follow-up lab work required by the health care provider. Also, remember to keep iron medicine out of the reach of children because too much iron can be toxic. If an overdose is ingested, call 911 or The National Poison Control Center @ 1-800-222-1222.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 www.guilfordhealth.org