

Anemia while pregnant



Anemia means that red blood cells or the amount of hemoglobin in red blood cells is low. Hemoglobin is a protein that carries oxygen to the body and the growing baby.

It's normal for many women to have mild anemia during pregnancy. But having more severe anemia can also happen.

SYMPTOMS

- Tiredness or weakness
- Paleness. This could be pale skin. It could also be paleness around the gums, eyes, or nailbeds.
- Cravings for unusual things, such as ice, dirt, or laundry starch.



CAUSES

During pregnancy, the body produces more blood to support the growth of the baby. Without adequate iron and other nutrients, the body might not be able to produce the amount of red blood cells it needs to make this extra blood.

There are three types of anemia that can happen during pregnancy:

- Iron-deficiency
- Folic-acid deficiency
- Vitamin B12

Iron-Deficiency Anemia

This is when there is not enough iron in the blood. It is the most common type of anemia during pregnancy.

There are three main causes of iron-deficiency anemia:

- Not eating enough foods that have iron
- Not absorbing enough of the iron that is eaten
- Losing blood from heavy monthly periods

Pregnant women should get 30 milligrams a day of iron, which is twice as much that is needed when you are not pregnant.

Folic-Acid Deficiency Anemia

Folic-acid deficiency anemia happens when folic acid levels are low. Folic acid is a B-vitamin. You need more than twice as much during pregnancy than at other times.

Pregnant women often don't get enough folic acid in their diets. A daily prenatal supplement that provides 400-800 milligrams is recommended for women who are pregnant or planning to get pregnant.

Adequate folic acid is also needed to reduce the risk of a baby being born with spina bifida. This is when the spine doesn't form properly. It also reduces the risk of having a preterm or low birth weight baby.

Vitamin B12 Deficiency Anemia

Without adequate amounts of this vitamin from the diet, the body can't make enough healthy red blood cells. Women who don't eat meat, poultry, dairy and eggs are at a greater risk of this. Vitamin B12 deficiency may contribute to birth defects, similar to inadequate folic acid.



TREATMENT

- Iron supplements treat iron-deficiency anemia, along with eating iron-rich and vitamin C-rich foods and beverages.
- Folic acid supplements treat folic acid deficiency, along with eating folic acid-rich foods and beverages.
- Vegans, vegetarians, and those who don't eat meat should discuss the need for a vitamin B12 supplement with their doctor.



SELF-CARE

TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Do you have any of these symptoms?

- Blood in the stools or urine or black, tarlike stools
- Heart palpitations. This is when the heart beats strong and fast for no reason.
- Irregular heartbeat
- Feeling faint and out of breath

NO

YES

▶ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Do you have any of these symptoms?

- Bleeding for no reason from the nose, mouth, gums, vagina, or rectum (rear end)
- Red dots of bleeding under the skin or bruises that appear for no reason
- Headaches

NO

YES

▶ **CALL DOCTOR**



Are you dizzy or weak when you stand up or do too much?

NO

YES

▶ **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE

Getting and Absorbing Iron

- Eat more iron rich foods. Examples: green leafy vegetables, lean red meat, poultry, dried fruit, and iron-fortified cereals.
- Take prenatal vitamins and iron pills. Follow your health care provider's advice. You absorb iron best on an empty stomach. Don't take vitamins with iron at the same time you take calcium or foods with a lot of calcium. Calcium lessens your body's power to absorb iron.
- Boost your body's power to absorb iron. Eat foods high in vitamin C. Examples: citrus fruits, tomatoes, strawberries.
- Limit black tea. Large amounts reduce iron absorption.
- Avoid antacids and phosphates. Phosphates are in soft drinks, beer, ice cream, and candy bars. Avoid the food additive EDTA, too. All these keep you from absorbing iron.

Getting and Absorbing Folic Acid

- Eat good food sources of folic acid every day. Examples: asparagus, brussels sprouts, spinach, romaine lettuce, collard greens, broccoli, black-eyed peas, cantaloupe, orange juice, oatmeal, fortified whole grain cereals.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Don't overcook food. Heat destroys folic acid.
- Take the daily prenatal vitamins named by your health care provider. These contain folic acid and other vitamins and iron.
- Don't smoke. Don't drink alcohol.

Getting Vitamin B12

- Eat foods that contain good sources, such as meat, poultry, eggs, low-fat dairy, and fortified breakfast cereal.
- If you don't eat animal products, you may need to take a vitamin B12 supplement or fortified nutritional yeasts.