

# Anemia: Iron Deficiency Type

## Definition

- Anemia means that your child doesn't have enough red blood cells
- Red blood cells carry oxygen in the blood stream
- Oxygen is needed by every cell in the body to function normally

## Health Information

### Symptoms

- Pale skin, nailbeds and gums
- Low energy and tires easily
- Short of breath with exercise
- More irritable than normal
- Severe anemia can cause dizziness or even fainting

### Cause

- Iron deficiency anemia is caused by a child not getting enough iron from their diet.
- Drinking too much milk is a common cause. Reason: no iron in milk.
- Iron is needed for your child's body to make red blood cells. Iron also is essential for your child's mental development.
- Iron deficiency anemia can also be caused by blood loss.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Anemia is diagnosed with a simple blood test.
- Iron deficiency is the most common type of anemia.
- It usually occurs in children 1 to 3 years old.
- It's easy to treat with iron supplements.

### 2. Iron Medicine by Mouth:

- Your child needs to take the iron medicine prescribed by your doctor.
- It needs to be taken for 2 to 3 months. Reason: to get the red blood cells back to a normal count.
- For children who dislike taking iron drops, mix them in their favorite fruit juice.
- Don't mix the iron with milk or formula. Reason: milk reduces absorption of iron.
- Iron medicines can sometimes cause an upset stomach. Take it with food to keep this from happening.
- Liquid iron medicines can stain the teeth. If this happens, brush your child's teeth with baking soda. Prevent by mixing the iron drops with orange juice.
- The iron may change the color of your child's poop to greenish black. This is harmless. Caution: Too much iron can cause poisoning. Treat iron like any medicine: Keep it out of your child's reach.

**3. Eat an Iron-Rich Diet:**

- If your child's diet is well-balanced, they should not get anemia again. Serve more of the following foods that contain iron:
- Red meats, fish and poultry are the best source. They contain iron that is more easily absorbed than iron from plants.
- Iron enriched cereals and breads. (check the label to be sure)
- Sweet potatoes, lima beans, kidney beans, chili beans, pinto beans, green peas and peanut butter. After age 4, raisins and dried fruits are safe.
- Egg yolks contain iron. But the body doesn't absorb it as well as the iron in other foods.

**4. Avoid Too Much Milk:**

- After 1 year of age, limit milk to 16 ounces per day (about 2 glasses).
- Reason: Milk doesn't have iron in it. Too much milk will also make your child feel full and less likely to eat enough iron-rich foods.
- If they are still on a bottle, discontinue it. Other option: only allow water in the bottle.

**5. Prevention: Iron Rich Baby Foods:**

- Most infant formulas contain the daily requirement of iron during the first year..
- Breast milk and cow's milk do not contain iron.
- To prevent iron deficiency, start baby foods at 6 months.
- Baby foods high in iron are sweet potato, beans, meats.

**6. Keep Follow-up Visits:**

- Your doctor needs to see your child in 1 to 2 weeks. Reason: to be sure the number of red blood cells is going up.
- Your doctor needs to see your child again in 2 months. Reason: to be sure the anemia is gone.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Your child won't take the iron medicine
- You have other concerns or questions

### Pediatric Care Advice

**Author:** Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

**Copyright 2000-2022** Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

**Disclaimer:** This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.