

Iron Deficiency Anemia

When red blood cells can't do their job

What is it?

The role of red blood cells is to deliver oxygen to your body. Anemia occurs when the level of red blood cells is too low to do this job properly.

What can cause anemia?

There are many possible causes of anemia. The most common cause is iron deficiency as a result of:

1. Lack of dietary iron: not enough iron in your diet
2. Loss of iron: losing iron, primarily through blood loss e.g. heavy menstrual periods, or intestinal bleeding

How does iron deficiency cause anemia?

Think of the red blood cell as a bicycle, traveling all over your body. Each red blood cell contains hemoglobin, which is like a basket that carries oxygen. Iron is needed to make this hemoglobin (the basket). Without enough iron, your bicycle won't be able to carry any oxygen.



What will it do to me?

Since anemia prevents oxygen from being delivered throughout the body, you will often feel tired, weak, lightheaded, or short of breath.

Other symptoms of anemia include:

- Fatigue during mild exercise
- Pale skin
- Cold hands and feet
- Fast heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Restless legs

What happens when anemia is not treated?

Extreme fatigue. If anemia is very severe, you may become too tired to do everyday tasks.

Heart problems. Anemia makes your heart work harder to try to circulate oxygen around the body. Over time, this can lead to an enlarged heart or heart failure.

What can I do?

There are things that you can do, and things that your doctor can do for you.

1.. Dietary Changes

Your doctor may ask you to eat more foods that are rich in iron. These include leafy greens, broccoli, red meat, seafood, and lentils. You should be eating 3-4 servings of vegetables per day and 3-4 servings of protein per day. See Canada's Food Guide for more details.

2. Iron Supplements

Your doctor may prescribe you iron pills to take daily. These should be taken on an empty stomach. You can take them with water, or with orange juice, which will help your body to absorb the iron.

3. Seeing a Specialist

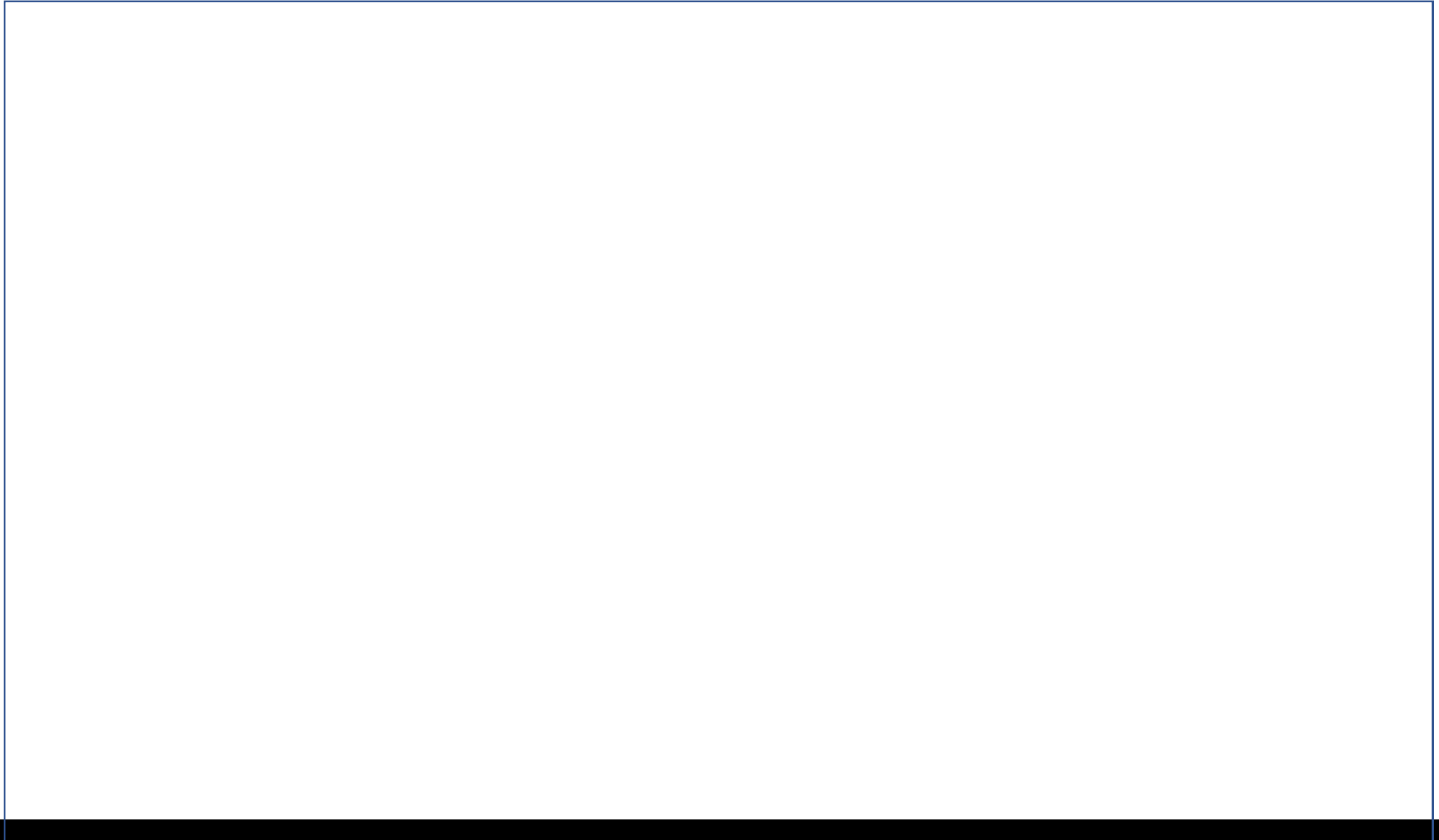
You may be referred to a **hematologist** – a doctor who specializes in blood disorders. The hematologist will investigate your anemia and rule out any more serious causes of anemia. In cases of severe iron deficiency, they may give you iron through an IV (directly into your bloodstream).

Still have questions? Ask us @ teachandlearnfm.com

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Patient-doctor learning area: Use this area to write down questions for your doctor or use it as a space for your doctor to answer your questions.



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