

# Anemia



Beaufort County Medical Center

## Medical Management

Anemia is a condition that occurs when the amount of hemoglobin, a protein that enables blood to carry oxygen in your body, drops below normal because of a shortage of red blood cells. Anemia can be caused by chemotherapy, radiation, or cancer itself. Please talk to your doctor or nurse for additional information about medical and lifestyle management of anemia if you have questions about these issues.

## Using Nutrition to Help Yourself

Your doctor may prescribe medication to treat your anemia, but what you eat and drink is important, too. The right food can give your body the nutrients it needs to form new red blood cells and can help keep your energy and strength up. If your anemia is related to low iron, certain food choices can help your body get the iron it needs.

## Nutrition Tips for Anemia

- If your doctor has prescribed medication to treat your anemia, take it exactly as directed.
- Cook with cast-iron pots and pans. Food, especially acidic food such as tomato sauce, will absorb iron from the pot.
- To better absorb iron, eat iron-rich food along with food or drinks that contain vitamin C, such as orange juice (without calcium).
- If your doctor or nurse recommends taking an iron supplement, try one that is labeled "Slow Iron" or "Slow Fe," which can be easier on your stomach.
- If your doctor or nurse recommends taking an iron supplement, choose one that contains a form of iron that is easier to absorb, which includes ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate, ferrous ascorbate, or ferric ammonium citrate.

## What to Eat and Drink

- Beef and other animal food are good sources of iron, with darker meat being highest in iron.
- Iron-rich vegetables include leafy greens, such as broccoli, spinach, kale, turnip greens, and collards; potatoes with the skin; lima beans; green peas; all other beans; and tomato sauce, especially if cooked in a cast iron pot.

- Iron-rich fruit includes dried apricots, dried figs, raisins, prunes, and prune juice.
- Iron-fortified bread, cereal, rice, and pasta can help you get more iron into your diet.
- Nuts and seeds, including cashews, sunflower seeds, walnuts, and almonds all contain some iron.
- Blackstrap molasses is very rich in iron. This isn't something that many people eat on a regular basis, but you can try it on hot cereal, such as oatmeal.



## What to Avoid

- Do not take an iron supplement unless directed to do so by your doctor or nurse. Not all types of anemia are caused by low iron and it is not good to take an iron supplement if you do not need it.
- Calcium makes it harder for your body to absorb iron. Do not eat iron-rich food or take iron supplements with milk or other calcium-rich food.\*
- Coffee, tea, and soda make it harder for your body to absorb iron. Do not eat iron-rich food or take an iron supplement with coffee, tea, or soda.\*
- High-fiber cereals make it harder for your body to absorb iron. Do not eat iron-rich food or take an iron supplement at the same time that you eat high-fiber cereals.\*
- Calcium supplements make it harder for your body to absorb iron. Do not eat iron-rich food or take an iron supplement at the same time you take calcium supplements.\*

\*It is OK to include milk, other calcium-rich food, coffee and tea, and calcium supplements in your diet. Just be sure to have these items at different times than when you eat iron-rich food or take an iron supplement.