



# CARE INSTRUCTIONS IRON DEFICIENCY ANEMIA

KAISER PERMANENTE | SANTA CLARA

## What is Anemia?

Normal amount of  
red blood cells



Anemic amount of  
red blood cells



Anemia means that you do not have enough red blood cells. Red blood cells carry oxygen around your body. When you have anemia, it can make you pale, weak, and tired.

**One cause of anemia is if you don't have enough iron in your diet or if it's hard for your body to absorb iron.** In some cases, pregnancy causes anemia. That's because a pregnant woman needs more iron.

Your doctor may do more tests to find the cause of your anemia. If a disease or other health problem is causing it, your doctor will treat that problem.

It's important to follow up with your doctor to make sure that your iron level returns to normal.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

- If your doctor recommended iron pills, take them as directed.
  - Try to take the pills on an empty stomach. You can do this about 1 hour before or 2 hours after meals. But you may need to take iron with food to avoid an upset stomach.
  - Do not take antacids or drink milk or anything with caffeine within 2 hours of when you take your iron. They keep your body from absorbing the iron as well.
  - Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. You may want to take iron pills with a glass of orange juice or some other food high in vitamin C.
  - Iron pills may cause stomach problems. These include heartburn, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, and cramps. It can help to drink plenty of fluids and include fruits, vegetables, and fiber in your diet.
  - It's normal for iron pills to make your stool a greenish or grayish-black. Internal bleeding may also cause dark stool. It's important to tell your doctor about any color changes.
  - If you miss a pill, do not take a double dose.
  - Keep iron pills out of the reach of small children. Too much iron can be very dangerous.
  - Eat foods with a lot of iron. These include red meat, shellfish, poultry, and eggs. They also include beans, raisins, whole-grain bread, and leafy green vegetables.
  - Steam your vegetables. This is the best way to prepare them if you want to get as much iron as possible.
  - Be safe with medicines. Do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory pain relievers unless your doctor tells you to. These include aspirin, naproxen (Aleve), and ibuprofen (Advil and Motrin).



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## When should you call for help?

- **Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:
  - You passed out (lost consciousness)
- **Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:
  - You are short of breath
  - You are dizzy, light-headed, or you feel like you might faint
  - You have new or worsened bleeding
- Watch closely for changes to your health and be sure to contact your doctor if:
  - You feel weaker or more tired than usual
  - You do not get better as expected

## Where can you learn more?

- **Go to <http://www.kp.org>**
  - Enter **Z825** in the search box to learn more about “**Iron Deficiency Anemia**”