

Iron Deficiency Anemia

I. **Definition:** Anemia means that the number of red blood cells in your child's body is below normal. The red blood cells carry oxygen in the bloodstream, and iron is needed for your body to produce red blood cells. Iron deficiency anemia is caused by a child obtaining too little iron from his or her diet.

II. Home Treatment

- a. Iron medicines may be prescribed. Your child's medicine is _____. Your child's dose is _____ mL, given _____ times a day.
 - i. This medicine contains iron and will need to be taken for 2 to 3 months to get your child's red blood cells back to a normal level. It can occasionally cause an upset stomach and should be taken with food to prevent this. Vitamin C containing juices increase iron absorption and prevent staining of the teeth, (see below). The iron may change the color of bowel movements to greenish-black, but this is harmless.
 1. Note: if teeth become stained the stain can be brushed off with baking soda.
 2. NOTE: too much iron can be dangerous. Treat it like other medications and keep it out of your child's reach.
- b. Diet alone can treat most cases of mild anemia. If your child's diet is well balanced, he or she will not get anemia again. The following foods contain large amounts of iron:
 - i. Red meats, fish, and dark meat poultry have the most iron.
 - ii. Raisins, dried fruits, sweet potatoes, lima beans, kidney beans, chili beans, pinto beans, green peas, peanut butter, enriched cereals such as total cereal, and breads are other iron-rich foods.
 - iii. Cooking in cast iron doubles the iron content of all foods. Make sure you prepare your skillet as per manufacture's directions to prevent rusting. All iron containing food should be taken with juices containing vitamin C, such as orange juice, or vitamin C fortified drinks. Vitamin C increases the absorption of iron.
- c. Your child should not drink more than 24 ounces of milk a day (about 3 glasses) so that he or she has adequate appetite for iron-containing foods. Milk doesn't contain any iron.

III. **Follow up visits:** We would like to see your child in 6 weeks to be sure the level of red blood cells in the blood has returned to normal.

IV. Call our office during office hours if:

- a. Your child refuses the iron medicine.
- b. You have other concerns or questions.

Adapted from B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

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