

ANEMIA IN PREGNANCY

One of the many things we look for during pregnancy is low blood iron or anemia. Please let me know if you have had a problem of low iron or anemia in the past.

Anemia is defined as a condition where your blood does not have enough red blood cells, or enough hemoglobin in the cells, or both. Since iron-rich hemoglobin is the substance in the red blood cells (actually, it is what *makes* them red) that carries oxygen to all parts of your body, if you are low in either hemoglobin or red blood cells, your tissues and organs are not getting as much oxygen as they need. You will very likely feel tired and weak, even when waking up in the morning, and look pale. Anemia is the most common medical complication of pregnancy, affecting from 15% to 50% of women.

HOW IS ANEMIA DETECTED?

If you are anemic, you may feel dizzy, tired and headachy. You might notice heart palpitations or spots before your eyes. The medical definition of anemia relies primarily on two measurements:

- your *hematocrit*: the percentage of red blood cells compared to your total blood volume; anemia is considered by most sources to be less than 30% in pregnancy
- your *hemoglobin*: the amount of hemoglobin in your red blood cells, measured in grams per deciliter; anemia is considered by most sources to be less than 10g/dL in pregnancy

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF ANEMIA?

Besides just feeling tired and dragged out, if you are anemic you are at greater risk of all types of infection and also of postpartum hemorrhage. You will be less able to tolerate even minimal blood loss during birth. Because you yourself have less oxygen circulating through your body, your baby will also not be getting as much oxygen as he or she needs. In cases of very severe anemia (= hemoglobin less than 6 g/dL) there is a greater incidence of stillbirth and small-for-gestational-age babies.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT / REMEDY ANEMIA?

1. DIET The most important thing you can do is to eat a diet rich in iron. An ideal amount of iron in pregnancy is 18-30 mg per day. Red meat is thought to be the most efficiently absorbed form of dietary iron, but there are many excellent and varied sources. The following foods contain about 5 mg of iron per serving:

Almonds (3/4 cup)	Calf liver (1 oz)
Peanuts (1 cup)	Pork liver (1/2 oz)
Dry pumpkin and squash seeds (1/4 cup)	Clams (3 oz)
Dry sunflower seeds (2/3 cup)	Oysters (5 medium size or 1/3 cup)
Sesame seeds (1/4 cup)	Tofu (2 cakes)
Walnuts (1 cup)	Full fat soy flour (1/2 cup)
Dried apricots (2/3 cup)	Blackstrap molasses (2 tablespoons)
Dried peaches (1/2 cup)	Greens, including beet greens, chard, dandelion greens, purslane leaves, kale, nettles and spinach (1 ½ cups cooked)
Prunes (1 cup)	Beans, including white, red, lima, black-eyed peas, lentils, and soybeans (1 cup cooked)
Raisins (1 cup)	
Braised kidney (1 oz)	
Beef liver (2 oz)	

2. IRON SUPPLEMENTS For some women, an iron supplement is necessary. Often, iron salts such as ferrous sulphate are prescribed, but in addition to causing constipation and upset stomach, iron salts interfere with the absorption of vitamin E in your intestines. Vitamin E is essential for optimal use of oxygen. Better forms of supplemental iron include ferrous fumarate, ferrous gluconate, and food-based iron supplements such as Floradix Herbs with Iron or Megafood Blood Builder (available at Community Pharmacy, Willy Street Coop, and Whole Foods).

It is important to keep in mind that calcium inhibits the absorption of iron, so avoid taking iron supplementation with milk or calcium supplements. High-quality, food-based prenatal vitamins take this interaction into account and are typically high in iron and low in calcium.

3. HERBS AND NATURAL REMEDIES

- 2 tablespoons of liquid chlorophyll twice daily in juice or water
- 2 tablespoons of black molasses per day
- cooking foods in cast iron pans measurably increases the iron content of your meals
- there are many herbs rich in highly absorbable organic iron: nettle, alfalfa, rose hips, watercress, yellow dock root, burdock root, parsley, and horsetail

HERBAL FORMULAS FOR ANEMIA

High Iron Tea (from Herbal Healing For Women, Gladstar)

1 part yellow dock root
1 part nettle leaf
1 part raspberry leaf

Brew this mixture extra strong by infusing two tablespoons of the mixture per cup of water and allowing it to steep overnight. Take by the tablespoon every hour or two throughout the day.