

Iron deficiency Anemia

What is Iron deficiency anemia?

Normal red cells contain haemoglobin that gives them their red colour and helps them carry oxygen around the body. In iron deficiency anemia (IDA) fewer smaller pale red blood cells are present due to a lack of the iron needed to make haemoglobin.

What are the signs and symptoms of IDA?

IDA is extremely common, often affecting children and women. It is commonly diagnosed due to extreme pallor (paleness), tiredness, and fatigue due to lack of red blood cells. Consumption of unusual substances (such as soil) may be seen, this is also called *pica*.

What are the causes of IDA?

Nutritional anemia (poor diet) can affect toddlers who may be consuming too much milk, and have a lack of iron in their diet, and also in women who lose iron with menstrual blood loss and pregnancy. Blood loss may occur due to Inflammatory Bowel Disease, hookworm, bleeding ulcers or haemorrhoids. In older adults, cancer of the colon or stomach should be considered.

How is IDA diagnosed?

IDA is easily diagnosed with a characteristic medical history and findings of anemia, along with a complete blood count (CBC) that shows low haemoglobin with small red cells. Because this develops over time, the hemoglobin level is markedly low at time of diagnosis, often 50% of normal or less. The platelet count is often elevated. If there is any doubt then iron studies can be performed which includes ferritin, serum iron and transferrin.

How is IDA treated?

Any underlying cause should be addressed such as nutritional deficiencies, excessive menstrual blood loss etc. IDA itself is treated with iron syrup or tablets, or sometimes with IV iron. Blood transfusion should not be routinely needed. Oral iron supplementation should continue for 3-6 months to replenish body iron stores.

What foods are good for IDA?

Iron-rich foods such as peas and beans, channa, black beans, beet, spinach, raisins, peanuts, dates and jaggery should be encouraged. Red meat and eggs are rich in iron but may not be acceptable for dietary reasons. Consumption of cow's milk in children should be drastically reduced to no more than half to one small cup daily.