

## **Maruthi Pediatrics**

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## **Iron Deficiency Anemia**

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### **What is iron deficiency anemia?**

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 child's body to produce red blood cells. Iron also is essential for optimal mental development in young children. Iron deficiency anemia is caused by a child not getting enough iron from his or her diet. The peak age for iron deficiency anemia is 1 to 3 years in toddlers. Anemia is diagnosed with a simple blood test.

### **How can I take care of my child?**

- **Iron medicines**

Your child may need iron medicine prescribed by your healthcare provider.

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. Mix the iron medicine with a juice containing Vitamin C (orange juice, for example). This will improve iron absorption and prevent staining of the teeth. Do not give iron with milk or formula because they reduce absorption. (NOTE: If the teeth become stained, the stain can be brushed off with baking soda.) The iron may change the color of bowel movements to greenish black, but this is harmless. Too much iron can be dangerous and can cause serious poisoning. Treat iron like any medicine: Keep it out of your child's reach.

Caution: Do not give your child iron supplements unless a healthcare provider has diagnosed iron deficiency anemia. Too much iron can poison a child.

- **Iron-Rich Diet**

If your child's diet is well-balanced, he or she won't get anemia again. The following foods contain iron:

- Meats, fish, and poultry have iron that is more easily absorbed than iron from plant sources.
- Raisins, dried fruits, sweet potatoes, lima beans, kidney beans, chili beans, pinto beans, green peas, peanut butter, enriched cereals, and breads are other iron-rich foods. Spinach and egg yolks also contain iron, but it is in a form that is not readily available to the body to absorb.

Your child should not drink more than 24 ounces of milk a day (about 3 glasses) so that he or she has an adequate appetite for solid iron-containing foods. Milk is low in iron.

- **Follow-up visits**

Your healthcare provider needs to see your child in 1 to 2 weeks and again in 2 months to be sure the level of red blood cells in the blood has returned to normal.

### **When should I call my child's healthcare provider?**

Call during office hours if:

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