

IRON DEFICIENCY

Iron deficiency occurs when your body's iron stores are depleted. Our bodies need iron to produce hemoglobin, which allows red blood cells to carry oxygen all over the body. If iron levels aren't high enough, the body can't make enough hemoglobin. Low hemoglobin is called anemia, which may be caused by iron deficiency, among other things. If you are iron deficient, you may have:

- Pale skin
- Fatigue or irritability
- Slow weight gain
- Pica (eating non-food items, like paper)

Causes

- Insufficient dietary source
 - The most common cause is not enough iron in the diet. This is particularly important for vegetarians.
- Excessive milk intake
 - Drinking more than 2.5 cups or 20 oz of milk per day
- Delayed introduction of solids
 - Iron-fortified solids should be introduced at 6 months
- Prematurity
 - Babies get iron from their mothers in the last trimester of pregnancy. If your baby is premature, they may need an iron supplement
- Blood loss, including menstruation

Treatment

- Give foods that are high in iron every day, such as red meats, fish, egg yolks, beans and green leafy vegetables.
- Iron supplementation may be suggested by your pediatrician. If needed you can divide into 2-3 doses per day to decrease the stomach upset and constipation. Once started, you need to take it for at least 3 months to replace your body's iron stores.
 - Your pediatrician will recommend a dose of elemental iron, which is the iron that is absorbed by the body. This may be different from the iron on the label. Ask the pharmacist if you have questions.
 - Common iron supplements used are Fer-in-sol and Feramax

For more information see the AHS handout on Iron for Babies and Young Children:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-iron-for-babies-and-young-children.pdf>