healthmap

Anemia and Kidney Disease



What Is Anemia?

Anemia means your body does not have enough healthy red blood cells. Red blood cells have a protein called *hemoglobin*, which carries oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body. When your hemoglobin level is low, you may feel tired, weak, dizzy, or short of breath. Anemia is common in people with kidney disease, but it can be treated.

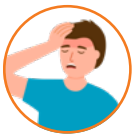
What Are Symptoms of Anemia?



Feeling tired or weak



Brittle nails



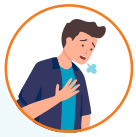
Headaches



Irritability or depression



Pale skin



Shortness of breath or dizziness



Cold hands and feet



Cravings for non-foods like dirt or ice

How Is Anemia Diagnosed?

Your doctor can check for anemia with a blood test called a *complete blood count* (CBC). This test shows your hemoglobin level. If your level is lower than normal, you may have anemia.

Normal hemoglobin levels can vary by lab, but they are usually:

- **Men:** greater than or equal to 13 g/dL
- **Women:** greater than or equal to 12 g/dL

Your doctor will compare your result with the normal range for your lab.

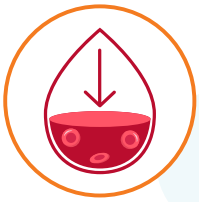
To find the cause of anemia, your doctor may order more blood tests, such as:

- Iron panel
- Vitamin B12 or folate

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What Causes Anemia?

Anemia can have many causes. Below are common causes in people with kidney disease, along with common treatments.



Iron Deficiency Anemia

Iron deficiency anemia happens when the body does not have enough iron. This can lead to your body to make fewer red blood cell than it needs.

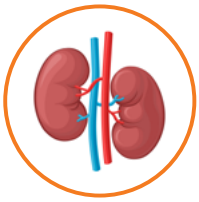
Treatment: Your doctor may prescribe iron. This depends on your blood tests and health needs. Iron may be taken as a pill or given through an IV.



Nutritional Anemia

This type of anemia happens when your body does not have enough vitamins, such as B12 or folate. Without enough of these vitamins, your body may not make enough red blood cells.

Treatment: If you are low in a vitamin, your doctor may suggest a supplement. Your doctor may also suggest dietary changes to help you get more of these vitamins.



Anemia Related to Advanced Kidney Disease

In people with advanced kidney disease or kidney failure, the kidneys may not make enough erythropoietin, also called “epo.” Epo is a hormone that tells your body to make red blood cells. When there is not enough epo, your body may not make enough red blood cells.

Treatment: If advanced kidney disease causes anemia, your doctor may prescribe epo. Epo may be given through an IV or as a shot under the skin. Your doctor will decide when to start this treatment. Epo works best when iron levels are normal first.



Anemia Related to Inflammation or Chronic Disease

Some health problems can cause swelling or irritation inside the body. These include diabetes, heart failure, kidney disease, cancer, long-term infections, and autoimmune disorders. This swelling can make it harder for your body to make healthy red blood cells and can lead to anemia.

Treatment: Treating the health problem that causes the swelling is often the best way to treat this type of anemia.



Blood Loss

Blood loss can happen for many reasons. Sometimes it is too small to see, which is often called “microscopic” blood loss. In adults, this type of blood loss often comes from the digestive tract, or gut. Causes may include ulcers, small blood vessels that bleed, hemorrhoids, or colon cancer.

Treatment: Depending on your test results, your doctor may send you to a gastroenterologist. Finding and treating the bleeding can help improve anemia. If you are age 45 or older and have never had a colonoscopy, ask your doctor if this test is right for you.

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Can Anemia Be Prevented?

Some types of anemia cannot be prevented, but there are steps you can take to lower your risk.

- A healthy, balanced diet gives most people enough iron to help prevent iron deficiency anemia.
- If you follow a vegan diet, your doctor may suggest a vitamin B12 supplement.
- During pregnancy, the body needs more iron. If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, your doctor may suggest prenatal vitamins with extra iron.
- Heavy menstrual periods can cause iron loss. Ask your doctor if an iron supplement may help.
- If you have a long-term health problem, follow your doctor's treatment plan.





When Should I Call My Doctor?

Call your doctor if:

- You feel very tired or weak and cannot do everyday tasks.
- You feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- You have trouble breathing.
- You notice signs of bleeding, such as heavy periods, easy bruising, blood in your stool, or black stool.

For help with managing your health, call Healthmap Solutions at 1-800-481-0474 (TTY: 711) or visit www.healthmapsolutions.com/patient-resources. Patients must meet program requirements to access Healthmap services.

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