

CottageHouseCall

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Anemia: Types and Treatments

As the most common blood condition in the U.S., anemia affects about 3.5 million Americans. Anemia is not like a cold that can be “caught” at any time; it develops because of a genetic condition or specific circumstances. The condition develops when blood lacks healthy red blood cells, which transport oxygen to the body. Without healthy red blood cells, blood can not provide adequate oxygen to all of the parts of the body.

Anemia can be caused by three things - blood loss, destruction of red blood cells or inadequate production of red blood cells. Each cause calls for a different course of treatment.

- Anemia from blood loss can be the result of heavy or irregular menstruation, childbirth or internal bleeding. It is not the result of a minor injury, like a cut, or regular menstrual cycles. To treat the problem, a physician will identify the source of bleeding, stop it and address any additional symptoms associated with the anemia.
- Anemia that develops as the result of red blood cell destruction can be caused by internal or external factors. The body may not make red blood cells strong enough to survive the circulatory system, which is usually the result of an inherited condition, such as sickle cell anemia. External factors that may destroy red blood cells are certain infections, toxin build-up in the body, tumors, venomous bites or severe burns. To address this form of anemia, a physician will treat the external factors with medication, surgery, blood transfusions, or a combination of therapies. Inherited conditions, such as sickle cell anemia, cannot be cured, but a physician can improve the quality of red blood cells through drug treatment and blood transfusions.
- The inadequate production of red blood cells can be caused by certain inherited conditions or by iron deficiency, vitamin deficiency or bone marrow problems. To treat this form of anemia, a physician will provide additional iron or vitamins through diet changes, injections or medication. Anemia caused by bone marrow problems is more serious and requires more intense treatment.

The symptoms of anemia will vary based on the underlying cause and any compounding health problems associated with the condition. The most common symptoms of anemia are:

- Unusually rapid heart beat, particularly with exercise
- Shortness of breath and headache, particularly with exercise
- Easy fatigue and loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Leg cramps
- Pale skin
- Dizziness
- Insomnia

Your physician can perform a series of blood tests to determine if you have anemia and what may be its underlying cause. Based on blood tests, symptoms and family history, your physician can tailor a treatment to address the anemia and its source. Because anemia has many causes, it is important to receive a diagnosis from a physician to determine the best treatment options for you.

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