

# Iron Deficiency Anemia

## McKenzie Pediatrics

### What Is Anemia?

Anemia means that the number of red blood cells in your child's body is below normal. Red blood cells carry oxygen in the blood stream to the body's cells, and iron is needed for the body to produce red blood cells. Iron deficiency anemia is the most common type of anemia in children, due to too little iron in their diet. It usually is correctable.

### How Do We Treat IDA?

If your child's red blood cell count is low enough, we may prescribe iron supplements for them to take in addition to their regular diet. Iron supplements need to be taken for 3 to 6 months in order to restore your child's red blood cell count to normal. Iron supplements should be taken with food to reduce the upset stomach that may occur with this therapy. You might also mix the iron with orange juice to hide the flavor; Vitamin C also helps the body to absorb more of the iron. Iron supplements need to be given towards the back of the mouth to avoid staining teeth; if they do become stained, brushing them with baking soda will remove the stains. Iron supplements may also change the color of the bowel movements to a greenish black color, which is harmless, but be sure that your child drinks plenty of fluids to prevent from becoming constipated. Most importantly, keep the iron out of reach, **an overdose of iron is potentially fatal!**

### What If I Choose Not To Give My Child Iron Supplements?

Chronic anemia leads to chronic under-oxygenation of the cells of the body, most importantly the brain. This might lead to slower development, and slower growth, during the most important years of your developing child's life. Dietary measures alone can help those children with mild anemia, and increasing dietary iron (see list below) might be all your child needs to resolve the anemia, but more moderate or severe anemia seldom is corrected solely through dietary means.

### Dietary Iron Sources:

#### Animal Sources:

Pork Chops, Lean Steak, Hamburger, Sardines, Dark-Meat Chicken, Tuna, Ham, White Meat Chicken, and Salmon (in descending order of iron-density)

#### Non -Animal Sources:

Dried Apricots, Beans & Lentils, Baked Potato With Skin, Almonds, Raisins, Enriched Pasta, Enriched Bread, Peanut Butter, Eggs, Enriched Breakfast Cereals, Broccoli, Spinach, and Peas (in descending order of iron-density)

#### Infant Sources:

Iron-fortified cereals and formula

**If begun on iron supplements, we would like to recheck your child's blood count within 2-3 weeks, so please schedule an appointment. Those children solely on dietary therapy we will recheck at their next checkup, or in 3 months, whichever is sooner.**  
Thanks! -Todd A. Huffman, M.D. (April 1999)