



## Iron Deficiency Anemia – Use of Iron Supplements

Iron supplementation is indicated when diet alone cannot restore low iron levels to normal within an acceptable timeframe. Iron is very important for the production of hemoglobin in your blood and for supplying oxygen to the red blood cells. If your body is low in iron, iron deficient anemia may develop. Your doctor may prescribe an iron supplement for this condition.

### How to take

- Iron supplements are best taken two hours after a meal. Your doctor may recommend that you take iron supplements with orange juice or with a vitamin C tablet. Vitamin C in orange juice or tablet form helps increase iron absorption.
- If iron upsets your stomach, your doctor may recommend that you take the iron with food or after meals with a full glass of water along with a Vitamin C tablet.
- Liquid forms of iron should be diluted with water or juice. If liquid iron is recommended, sip the iron through a straw to prevent staining of the teeth.

### What you need to know about taking Iron

- Do eat and/or drink foods with Vitamin C such as orange juice, strawberries, and others. Your doctor may also recommend taking a Vitamin C supplement. Vitamin C helps your body to absorb iron.
- Do not take iron with milk or eggs. This can limit the absorption of iron.
- Do not take iron with antacids. It can decrease the effect of iron.
- Do not drink coffee or tea with a meal or within one hour after. It makes it much harder for your body to absorb the iron.
- Do not take iron with food products that contain large amounts of calcium such as milk, bran flakes, lentils, potatoes, and oatmeal. Calcium can decrease iron absorption by a third.

### Side Effects

- Iron supplements can cause constipation, therefore; your doctor may recommend a stool softener or a laxative. Iron preparations can also cause stomach cramps, stomach irritation, heartburn, nausea, and vomiting the first few days as your body adjusts to the medication. Iron almost always turns stools dark green or black. This is due to unabsorbed iron which is a harmless side effect of the supplement.
- Call your doctor if you develop severe stomach pains, chest pain, clammy skin, bluish colored lips or fingernails, diarrhea, tarry stools, weak and rapid pulse, or unusual tiredness.

### Precaution

- Iron preparations are very dangerous for children. An overdose can be fatal. It is important to keep iron supplements tightly capped and away from children's reach. Any time excessive iron intake is suspected, immediately call your physician or Poison Control Center, or visit your local emergency department.



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