



Anemia

Dimock Community Health Center



What is anemia?

Anemia means that there is a lower amount of red blood cells (RBCs) in the body than usual. Red blood cells are made in your bone marrow. Red blood cells carry hemoglobin, a protein that takes oxygen from the air in your lungs and then releases it into your body for use. If you are anemic, you have too few red blood cells, and your body tissues can't perform their usual jobs. We can test for anemia with a simple blood test called a complete blood count (CBC). This test measures the concentration of your red blood cells, called the hematocrit and the amount of hemoglobin.

What are the symptoms of anemia?

If your red blood cells are only a little low, you may have no symptoms at all. If you become more severely anemic, you might feel short of breath, dizzy when you stand up, or just very tired. Sometimes when you're anemic your heartbeat (pulse) will increase.

What causes anemia?

1. Breakdown of red blood cells – infections, various medicines, or diseases such as sickle cell can destroy RBCs.
2. Blood loss – bleeding from injuries, stomach ulcers, certain cancers, or heavy menstrual cycles can result in low RBC levels.
3. Not making enough red blood cells – low levels of iron in the blood, problems with your bone marrow, infections including HIV itself, some cancers, and certain medications like Bactrim and AZT can keep your body from making enough RBCs. These are the most common reasons why people with HIV have anemia.

Why should I be concerned about anemia?

Anemia can cause symptoms which interfere with your activities and can be dangerous if it gets too severe, especially if you have problems with your heart or lungs. Anemia can also be a sign of infection or cancer.

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What is the treatment for anemia?

If the anemia is mild, no treatment may be necessary. If the anemia is severe, treatments such as iron supplements to help your body make more red blood cells, stopping medications, or even blood transfusions may be necessary. The long-term treatment will depend on why you are anemic.