

Iron Deficiency Anemia: Your Iron Pill Guide

Medical-Surgical · Hematology / Oncology

Anemia means your blood has too few healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen. Low iron is a common cause. Iron-rich foods and iron pills help your body make new red blood cells.

Know the signs

- Feeling tired or weak
- Pale skin
- Shortness of breath or a fast heartbeat when you are active
- Craving ice

Eat iron-rich foods

- Red meat, chicken, fish, beans, lentils, and dark leafy greens
- Cereals and breads with added iron
- Eat them with vitamin C foods, such as oranges, tomatoes, or strawberries. Vitamin C helps your body take in iron.

Take your iron pill the right way

- Take it 1 hour before a meal, with water or orange juice.
- If it upsets your stomach, take it with a little food.
- **Keep milk, tea, coffee, calcium pills, and antacids (Tums) 2 hours away from your iron.**
- Liquid iron: drink it through a straw, then rinse your mouth. This protects your teeth.
- Keep taking it until your provider says to stop, even when you feel better.

Expect some changes

- Dark green or black stools are normal with iron.

- For constipation: drink more fluids, eat more fiber, and stay active. Ask about a stool softener.

Keep iron away from children

- **Iron pills are a leading cause of deadly poisoning in young children.** Store them in a child-proof bottle, out of reach.

Call your provider today if you have

- Black, sticky, tar-like stools without dizziness. This can be a sign of bleeding.
- Constipation or an upset stomach that stops you from taking iron
- More tiredness or shortness of breath

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Chest pain
- Black, sticky, tar-like stools **with dizziness, weakness, or fainting**. This is a sign of serious bleeding.
- Fainting or severe trouble breathing
- **A child who swallowed iron pills:** call 911 or Poison Control (1-800-222-1222 in the US) or your local poison center right away, even if the child seems fine

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/iron-deficiency-anemia-iron-pills/patient

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