

## What Is Iron?<sup>1</sup>

Iron is a tiny mineral that has a huge impact on how we feel and how our bodies function. Iron is found in every human cell and affects everything from our immune system, brain development and temperature, to our metabolism and work performance. While our bodies don't naturally produce iron, we can usually get the iron we need through the foods we eat.

## Why Do Our Bodies Need Iron?<sup>2</sup>

Without iron, our bodies can't function properly. Our bodies use iron to make proteins called hemoglobin and myoglobin, which help carry and store oxygen in the body through red blood cells and muscles. Iron is also part of many other proteins and molecules that ensure good health. You may feel "under the weather" if your body doesn't have enough iron and it can also lead to other health problems like memory loss, irregular heartbeat and a weakened immune system.

## What Is Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA)?<sup>3</sup>

Iron deficiency anemia is the most common form of anemia, a condition where your body does not produce enough healthy red blood cells. When your body doesn't get the iron it needs, it fails to produce enough healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout your body.

## What Causes IDA?<sup>4</sup>

Iron deficiency anemia is caused by not having enough iron in your body. Your body can run low on iron for reasons

including: if you lose more iron than your body can replace; if your body has trouble absorbing iron; if you are not eating enough iron-rich foods; or if you need more iron than normal (i.e. during times of pregnancy or breastfeeding).

## How Do I Know If I Am Anemic?<sup>5</sup>

Many of us are anemic and have no symptoms at all. If you do experience symptoms, they are typically mild at first and develop slowly. The most common symptom is feeling weak or tired more than usual or with exercise. Others can include feeling grumpy, headaches or problems with concentrating. As the anemia gets worse, you could experience a blue color to the whites of the eyes, brittle nails, light-headedness when you stand, pale skin color, shortness of breath or a sore tongue.

## What Should I Do If I Think I May Have IDA?<sup>6</sup>

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of IDA, you should talk to your health care provider. He or she will likely check the levels of iron in your blood and, if you are iron deficient, discuss ways to manage your condition.

## Who Is Most At Risk For IDA?<sup>7</sup>

There are certain risk factors that can make you more susceptible to IDA. Those can include heavy menstrual bleeding, chronic kidney disease (CKD), gastrointestinal disorders such as bleeding ulcers, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and recent weight-loss surgery, inflammatory diseases, cancer and chemotherapy-induced anemia.

**You should always talk to your health care provider  
before making any changes to your diet and exercise routine.**

**For more information, visit [ironmatters.com](http://ironmatters.com)**

<sup>1</sup> National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements. Dietary Supplement Fact Sheet, "Iron: What is it?," "What affects iron absorption?," "Signs of IDA." <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional/>. Accessed 3/28/13.

<sup>2</sup> National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements. Dietary Supplement Fact Sheet, "Iron: What is it?" <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional/>. Accessed 3/28/13.

<sup>3</sup> A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia. 2012, Feb. 7. "Iron Deficiency Anemia." PubMed Health. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001610/>. Accessed: 3/28/2013.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. "Causes, incidence, and risk factors."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. "Symptoms."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. "Symptoms."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. "Causes, incidence, and risk factors."