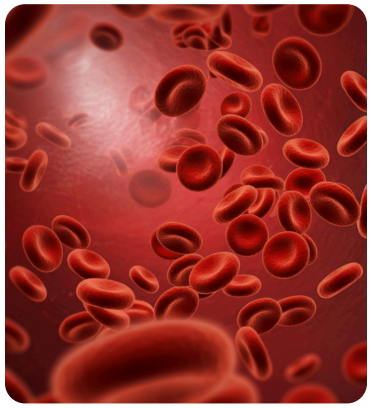
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

Public Health
Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health

UNDERSTANDING ANEMIA: IRON AND FOLATE DEFICIENCIES, PREVENTION, AND TREATMENT

Anemia is a common concern during pregnancy, as the body requires more nutrients to support both the parent and the baby. When these needs are not met, particularly for iron and folic acid, the body may struggle to produce enough healthy red blood cells, leading to potential health risks if left untreated. Prevention includes a balanced diet rich in iron and folic acid, prenatal vitamins, and regular checkups. Treatment involves iron and/or folic acid supplementation as directed by a healthcare provider.



Understanding Iron-Deficiency Anemia in Pregnancy

Anemia occurs when the body does not have enough healthy red blood cells or hemoglobin, which reduces the amount of oxygen delivered to tissues. The most common types are iron-deficiency anemia and folate-deficiency anemia.

Iron-deficiency anemia happens when the body lacks enough iron to make hemoglobin, reducing oxygen delivery in the blood. It is caused by low intake, poor absorption, blood loss, or increased needs during pregnancy, when iron demand rises. Common symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Pale skin
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath

During pregnancy, untreated anemia can increase health risks, making early identification and treatment especially important.

What is Folic Acid?

Folic acid, also known as folate, is a B vitamin that helps the body produce new cells, including red blood cells, and is essential during pregnancy for healthy brain and spine development. All women of childbearing age are encouraged to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid daily, starting at least one month before pregnancy and continuing throughout early pregnancy.

Understanding Folate–Deficiency Anemia in Pregnancy

Folate-deficiency anemia occurs when the body does not have enough folic acid to form healthy red blood cells. Without adequate folate, red blood cells become large and less effective at carrying oxygen, which can lead to:

- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Reduced appetite
- Irritability or mood changes
- Diarrhea
- Smooth and tender tongue

Folic acid is also vital for the baby's early brain and spine development. Low folate levels during pregnancy increase the risk of complications such as preterm birth, low birth weight, excessive blood loss during delivery, and neural tube defects. Ensuring enough folic acid helps support both maternal health and healthy fetal growth.

Prevention and Management

Anemia can be prevented and managed by eating foods rich in iron and folic acid, taking prenatal vitamins, and attending regular prenatal screenings. Foods such as lean meats, beans, leafy greens, fortified cereals, and citrus fruits help support healthy nutrient levels.

Treatment may include iron or folic acid supplements as recommended by a healthcare provider. During pregnancy, most people need about 27 mg of iron and 400 mcg of folic acid each day to support healthy blood production and fetal development.

Key Takeaway

Anemia is common during pregnancy, but it can be prevented and treated. Adequate iron and folic acid support healthy red blood cells, maternal health, and fetal development. Regular checkups, proper nutrition, and guidance from a healthcare provider help reduce risks for both mother and baby.

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Healthy Vegetarian or Vegan Eating Plan
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- March of Dimes: Healthy Moms. Strong Babies

For more information about MCAH, please email us at askMCAH@SBcounty.gov or call 800-227-3034.