

# Why do I need a hemoglobin blood test?

Hemoglobin is a protein in your blood that contains iron. It carries oxygen through your body, gives you energy, and helps fight infection. A hemoglobin blood test can tell if your iron levels may be low.

Low amounts of iron in your blood can put you at risk for a health condition called iron-deficient anemia. Iron-deficient anemia can cause you to have your baby too soon (a premature baby) or can cause your baby to be small at birth. Children who have anemia may have growth problems or have a hard time learning.

## What causes low iron or hemoglobin?

- When you lose blood during your period (menstrual bleeding).
- Your baby's iron can be low if your iron is low during pregnancy.
- When your body grows quickly (like during pregnancy or when children are young).
- If you get more calcium than your body needs. Calcium helps you have strong bones, but too much can make it so your body doesn't use all the iron from the food you eat.
- If you get too much caffeine. Too much caffeine can make it so your body doesn't use all the iron from the food you eat.

## How do I know if my iron is low?

Talk to your doctor if WIC tells you your hemoglobin is low. Your doctor can do an iron blood test to check if your iron levels are low. You should also talk to your doctor if you or your child:

- Feel tired or weak.
- Get sick more often than you used to.
- Feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- Notice your skin looks pale or the color looks different than it used to.
- Feel upset or mad more than normal.

These can be signs that you have low iron.

## What can I do if my iron is low?



### Eat foods high in iron at every meal.

Foods with the most iron:

- Beef, clams, lamb, liver, and shrimp
- WIC cereals or cereal with at least 45% iron per serving.

Other good sources of iron:

- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Bread and pastas fortified with iron (added iron)
- Chicken, pork, turkey, and fish
- Tofu
- Eggs
- Spinach

**Women who are pregnant need to be careful about the food they eat.** Women who are pregnant are more likely to get sick from certain foods than other people.

Eat meat, poultry, eggs and fish only if they are **fully cooked**.



### Try to eat foods high in vitamin C when you eat foods high in iron.

This helps your body absorb and use more iron from food. These foods are good sources of vitamin C:

- Bell peppers
- Berries
- Broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage
- Kiwi, mango, papaya, and melon
- Leafy greens, like spinach
- Oranges, grapefruit, and tangerines
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes



### Eat the right amount of dairy foods.

Calcium helps you make strong bones, but too much can make it so your body doesn't use all the iron from the foods you eat.

- Children only need 16 ounces (2 cups) of dairy each day.
- Adults only need 24 ounces (3 cups) of dairy each day.
- Eat dairy foods 1 to 2 hours after you eat foods with iron.
- Take vitamins with water instead of milk.



### Don't drink coffee or tea when you eat foods high in iron.

Compounds in coffee and some teas (tannins and polyphenols) can stop your body from using iron in food.

- Change when you drink your coffee or tea if you have low iron. Drink them between meals to help your body use iron from the foods you eat (instead of during meals).
- Keep the amount of coffee or tea you drink to 1-2 cups each day if you have low iron.



### Ask your doctor if you need to take a vitamin or supplement.

- Pregnant women should take a prenatal or multivitamin every day unless a doctor tells you not to.
- Talk to a doctor to find out if you need to take an iron supplement.