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Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at The Reschini Group

All About Anemia

Anemia is a blood disorder that occurs when the blood has less than normal levels of red blood cells, or when there is a lack of hemoglobin, a form of protein, in the blood. Hemoglobin gives blood its red color and carries oxygen from the lungs to the other parts of the body.

Anemia sufferers do not get enough oxygen to all the parts of their body, which limits how well organs and tissues can function. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that more than three million people in the United States suffer from anemia, making it a significant concern for many people.

Causes

There are three main causes of anemia. One or more of these problems may occur at the same time:

1. The body loses too much blood through heavy menstrual periods, disease or trauma.
2. The body has trouble making red blood cells.
3. The red blood cells break down or die faster than the body can replace them with new ones.

Types of Anemia

There are several types of anemia that individuals suffer from:

• Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA):

- The body is iron-deficient, which harms its ability to make hemoglobin.
- Causes: heavy menstrual cycles, child birth, ulcers, colon polyps, colon cancer, regular use of pain relievers (aspirin), infection, severe injury and surgery. Also caused by not eating enough iron-fortified foods such as meat, poultry, eggs and fish.
- Those with Crohn's disease and celiac disease also cannot absorb iron well.

• Vitamin Deficiency Anemia (Megaloblastic Anemia):

- The body is deficient in B12, or folate. B12 is needed to make red blood cells and keeps the nervous system functioning.

- Causes: having an autoimmune disease, a diet does not have a significant amount of B12 (found in meat products), and diets without a significant amount of folate (folic acid) found in leafy greens and fruits
- Anemia Resulting from Disease
 - Some underlying diseases affect the body's ability to make red blood cells.
 - Anemia Resulting from Inherited Blood Diseases
 - Inherited blood diseases such as sickle cell anemia or thalassemia pose greater risks of developing anemia.



- **Aplastic Anemia**

- A blood disorder in which the body stops making enough new red blood cells
- Causes: cancer treatments, exposure to toxic chemicals, some prescription drugs, autoimmune diseases and viral infections

Signs of Anemia

When first becoming anemic, the body does not necessarily show signs of a problem or the symptoms may be extremely mild. As the disease worsens, the following symptoms become prevalent as the heart works harder to pump more oxygen-rich blood through the body:

- Fatigue and weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Numbness or coldness in the hands and feet
- Low body temperature
- Pale skin
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Irritability
- Jaundice (yellow-tinged skin)
- Yellowing of the whites of the eyes
- Enlarged spleen
- Dark, tea-colored urine
- Developmental delays and behavioral disturbances (in infants and preschool children)

Diagnosis

To determine if you have anemia, your doctor will perform a CBC blood test, give you a physical exam, discuss your diet and the prescriptions you are taking, and listen to your family history. If you are diagnosed with anemia, your doctor will do further tests to determine the exact cause of the disease.

Treatment Options

Your doctor will most likely prescribe medication depending on the variation of anemia that you suffer from. He/she may also recommend that you take vitamin supplements if you suffer from IDA or vitamin deficiency anemia.

Prevention

Though the disease is not preventable in all instances, there are things you can do to reduce your risk of becoming anemic:

- Eat iron-rich foods such as cereal, bread, lentils, beans, tofu, leafy vegetables, lean red meat, fish and dried fruits.
- Eat and drink foods that help your body absorb iron such as organic juice, strawberries and broccoli.
- Find alternative ways of obtaining calcium into your diet, as too much can hurt your body's ability to absorb iron.
- Eat a balanced diet and avoid fad diets.

- Take vitamin supplements (talk with your doctor before doing so).

For more information about anemia, visit these Web sites:

- The Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa,
- The American Dietetic Association
www.eatright.org
- The Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation, Inc. www.aamds.org
- The Iron Disorders Institute at www.irondisorders.org.

Did You Know...?

Some forms of anemia are life-threatening if they go undiagnosed and untreated. By not getting enough oxygen, the organs can become damaged. Also, since the heart must work harder to pump red blood cells throughout the body, the extra work can eventually lead to heart failure.