

- Medications for high blood pressure and thyroid deficiency have a reduced effect if taken within two hours of taking iron.

When taking iron tablets

If possible, iron should be taken with a large glass of water, half an hour before food.

If this causes an upset tummy, it can be taken with food.

The colour of your bowel motions and urine can darken when taking iron.

If iron tablets are causing you side-effects, please talk to your midwife or doctor, there may be another treatment option for you.

Other causes of anaemia

Low Folic Acid levels

Low levels of Folic Acid are linked to anaemia, as well as problems with the way baby's brain or spine develops (e.g. spina bifida).

To prevent these defects, folic acid should be taken by all women before becoming pregnant and during the first 3 months of pregnancy.

Alcohol can lower folic acid levels.

Women who have diabetes, who are overweight, are taking certain anti-epileptic medications, families with spina bifida or a history of having babies with spina bifida should

take folic acid three months before pregnancy at the higher dose of 5mg daily.

Low Vitamin B12 levels

Low Vitamin B12 levels is a rare cause of anaemia and found more in women who do have a history of gastric surgery, following a vegan or vegetarian diet.

Talk to your midwife or doctor to have your Vitamin B12 levels monitored during pregnancy and also during breastfeeding.

Dairy and animal products contain B12.

Low vitamin B12 levels creates tingling in the hands or feet so it is important you report this to your midwife or doctor.

If your Vitamin B12 levels are low, your midwife or doctor can prescribe treatment for you with a course of injections.

Untreated low Vitamin B12 levels can lead to nerve problems for the mother, and also affect the way baby's brain and spine develop.



Iron and Anaemia in Pregnancy

Information for Pregnant Women and Whanau

 COUNTIES MANUKAU HEALTH	Department: Women's Health	Updated: July 2019
	Approved by: Director of Midwifery	Review: July 2022
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What is anaemia in pregnancy?

Anaemia is when there are less of the oxygen carrying cells in the blood, which may be due to a variety of causes.

Anaemia can be picked up on a blood tests that is checked at your first appointment and again when you are 26-28 weeks and 36 weeks pregnant.

Your midwife or doctor will inform you if your blood results show anaemia, and arrange any extra tests to work out why you are anaemic.

Why do I have a lack of iron?

Lack of iron (deficiency) anaemia is the most common type of anaemia in women of childbearing age.

The body uses iron to make red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body.

Causes include heavy periods, a poor diet, smoking and a short gap between pregnancies.

When your iron levels are low you might be:

- Feeling tired
- Looking pale
- Breathless on exercising
- At risk for infections
- Having difficulties concentrating
- At increased risk of haemorrhage (very heavy bleeding) after the birth
- Your body may be less able to cope with blood loss

Effects of your iron-deficiency anaemia on baby:

- Growth can be slower and baby may be more likely to have a low birthweight
- Dangerous complication where the of placenta/whenua separates before birth Lower amounts of oxygen getting to the baby
- Premature (before 37 weeks) birth
- Iron deficiency in baby after birth
- Baby growing or developing slower after birth

How is low iron (anaemia) treated?

Following the suggestions in this pamphlet may help stop your iron levels from becoming low.

If your iron levels remain low, supplements in form of tablets, liquid, or an infusion (a drip) may be needed to treat severe (really bad) anaemia.

Eat iron rich foods

Eating well and a healthy, balanced diet will help you either prevent anaemia or manage your symptoms if you have it.

Some food has more iron in it than others. For example, animal-based foods are particularly rich in iron and are most easily absorbed.

Take Vitamin C to help with iron absorption

(getting iron into your body)

Eat some of these fruits and vegetables with your meals to assist better absorption of iron:

- Mandarins, oranges, tamarillo fruit and lemons
- Fruit juice, kiwi fruit and feijoa fruit
- Cauliflower, broccoli, green capsicum and tomatoes
- Avoid drinking fruit juice if you have diabetes in pregnancy.

Certain food can help to boost your iron:

- Red meat, fish and poultry can be more easily absorbed than iron found in plant based foods.
- Wholegrain bread, cereals, egg yolk and legumes (like chickpeas, kidney beans)
- Dried fruit (Dates), vegetables, nuts and seeds – all contain iron.

Avoid these:

(because they can block getting iron in to your body)

- Smoking
- tea and coffee (including decaf versions),
- milky drinks

especially with a meal, because this can stop iron being absorbed into your body.

It will be helpful to cut down on your caffeine intake in pregnancy anyway.

If you are taking other medication(s) it is important please discuss with your midwife or doctor what is suitable for you.

- Medicines taken to relieve indigestion can also block the effect of iron.