

Preventing Low Iron Levels and Iron deficiency Anaemia in pregnancy

During pregnancy your body needs more iron than usual. It is common for iron levels to become low and for iron deficiency anaemia to develop.

Fortunately, we can easily treat low iron levels and iron deficiency anaemia during pregnancy.

Informed decisions using B.R.A.N. – Benefits – Risks – Alternatives - Nothing

What are the Benefits?

Treating low iron levels or iron deficiency anaemia with iron supplements will reduce the chance of anaemia having an impact on your, or your baby's wellbeing.

If your iron levels are within the normal range, you are less likely to experience symptoms of anaemia, such as tiredness.

What are the Risks?

Sometimes iron supplements can cause side effects like a metallic taste in your mouth, nausea, pain in your stomach, an upset stomach, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation. Do not be concerned if you notice that your stool (poo) turns black – this is another common side effect.

The current recommendation is to take one iron tablet, once each day. This makes side effects less likely.

The best way to take iron is

- On an empty stomach (before eating anything else)
- With orange juice (or water with lemon juice or a vitamin C tablet, such as your Healthy Start vitamins)

It is best to avoid taking iron within 2 hours of taking

- Milk
- Tea
- Coffee
- Fizzy drinks (such as Cola or Irn Bru)
- Antacid medicines (such as Peptac, Gaviscon, or Omeprazole)
- Thyroxine (thyroid medication)
- Calcium tablets
- Prenatal vitamins containing calcium

If you experience constipation, eating foods that have a lot of fibre, such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrains, as well as drinking lots of water can help. If this is not enough speak to your GP or pharmacist about medicines to ease constipation.

What are the Alternatives?

Eating Food Rich in Iron

When you are pregnant it is not always possible to get enough iron from just the food you eat, but eating iron rich foods will help. Eating lots of different foods rich in iron will help your body absorb more iron.

You can get iron from:

- red meat, such as beef and lamb – choose meat with very little fat
- pulses, such as lentils and beans
- wholemeal bread
- green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, broccoli, kale and watercress
- wholegrain, low-sugar breakfast cereals with added iron
- dried fruit
- eggs
- tofu
- nuts and seeds



Other treatments for anaemia

Sometimes an iron rich diet, or an iron rich diet combined with iron supplements is not enough. If this happens, or if you are not able to take iron tablets or syrup, we may offer you iron through intravenous (IV) therapy. This means giving you iron in liquid form through a needle directly into a vein (usually in your arm). We may also offer you a blood transfusion.

What if I do Nothing?

Most women with anaemia in pregnancy go on to have a healthy pregnancy and baby. However, anaemia increases the chance that:

Some women might

- Go into labour early
- Need a blood transfusion
- Have low mood or depression after birth

Some babies might

- Weigh less when they are born
- Develop more slowly
- Have anaemia themselves in the early days

For more information:

If you need more information please speak to your midwife or doctor, or visit NHS Inform Ready Steady Baby 🌐 <https://www.nhsinform.scot/ready-steady-baby>

If you have any urgent concerns or worries about your or your baby's wellbeing during your pregnancy, please contact Maternity Assessment or Triage.

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| • Princess Royal Maternity | – | 📞 0141 201 3454 or 0141 201 3452 |
| • Queen Elizabeth University Hospital | – | 📞 0141 232 4363 or 0141 232 4377 |
| • Royal Alexandra Hospital | – | 📞 0141 314 6067 |