

# Iron Deficiency

## What is iron deficiency?

Iron deficiency happens when your blood doesn't have enough iron. Iron is a mineral that helps carry oxygen through your body, giving you energy. Without enough iron, your body can't work as well, and you may feel tired and weak. Iron Deficiency Anaemia is when iron deficiency becomes severe enough to have fewer red blood cells.

## What causes iron deficiency?

Iron deficiency happens when your body doesn't get enough iron. This can happen because:

- You don't eat enough iron-rich foods.
- Your body loses too much blood (e.g., heavy periods, injuries, rectal bleeding).
- Your body doesn't absorb iron well (e.g., due to illness or medicines).

## How did I get iron deficiency?

Some common reasons include:

- Not eating enough foods like meat, chicken, or green vegetables.
- Losing blood during periods or from internal bleeding.
- Growth spurts during childhood or pregnancy, which use up more iron.
- Giving babies cow's milk before they are 1 year old.
- Hookworm infection.

## How do I feel / How do I look with iron deficiency?

You might feel or notice:

- Always feeling tired, weak, or dizzy.

Without enough iron, your body can't work as well, and you may feel tired and weak.

- Short of breath when walking or working.
- Headaches or trouble concentrating.
- Restless legs at night.
- Pale skin or gums.
- Craving strange things like dirt or ice.

## How does the doctor know I have iron deficiency?

If you have any of the above symptoms, you should have a yarn with your GP or healthcare worker. They will:

- Ask about your symptoms and health history.
- Take a blood test to check your iron levels.
- Sometimes look for other causes, like bleeding or stomach problems.

## How can we fix iron deficiency?

1. Eat to add more iron-rich foods every day:
  - Best sources: beef, kangaroo, chicken, fish, or liver.
  - Other sources: eggs, beans, green vegetables, dried fruit, and wholegrain bread.
2. Take iron supplements if your GP recommends them.
3. Try to add more Vitamin C to your meals:
  - Foods like oranges, capsicum, and tomatoes help your body absorb iron better.
4. Ask for Help:
  - If you're not feeling your best, it's always a good idea to yarn with your GP or an Aboriginal Healthcare worker.

