

## Patient information

# Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA)

## Gastroenterology and Hepatology

Your recent blood tests show that you have **Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA)**.

### What is Iron Deficiency Anaemia?

Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA) is a condition where a lack of iron in the body (iron deficiency) results in a reduction in the number of red blood cells circulating around the body (anaemia).

### What are the symptoms of IDA?

A common symptom of IDA is tiredness with patients reporting feeling exhausted, lethargic and weak. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, irregular heartbeats, headaches and dizziness.

Physical signs may also include pale skin, brittle nails, swelling or soreness of the tongue and cracks in the sides of the mouth.

### What are the causes of IDA?

**There are three main causes of IDA:**

#### 1. Blood loss

In pre-menopausal women menstrual blood loss is the most common cause of IDA. In men and post-menopausal women blood loss from the gut is the most common cause.

#### 2. Inflammation

People with long term inflammatory conditions such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) frequently have IDA as inflammation can block iron absorption from the gut.

#### 3. Reduced absorption of iron (malabsorption)

People with malabsorption due to damage to the gut or following surgery to remove the stomach or part of the small bowel have a reduced ability to absorb iron and are at risk of developing IDA.

This can also be seen in patients with undiagnosed coeliac disease where the lining of the small bowel is damaged by gluten in the diet resulting in reduced iron absorption

## **How is IDA diagnosed?**

IDA is diagnosed by blood tests. Your family doctor (GP) may have requested these because you have signs or symptoms of IDA or it may have been picked up by ~~coincidence~~ chance at a routine blood test.

## **How is IDA investigated?**

### **Blood Tests**

These will have been done before your clinic appointment and will provide an up to date picture of your anaemia and your body's iron stores, but these results may prompt further blood tests that may be requested at your clinic visit.

Your blood results will tell us if you are having trouble absorbing vitamin B12 or folic acid from your diet. They will also provide us with information about your salt and mineral levels and the general health of your liver and kidneys.

To find out what is causing your anaemia we will perform a series of investigations and a brief explanation of these tests follows.

### **Gastroscopy**

This is a camera test (endoscopy) that looks at your gullet (oesophagus), stomach and the first part of your small bowel (duodenum) to make sure there are no problems here which may be causing your anaemia. It also allows us to take small samples (biopsies) from your small bowel to check you are absorbing iron efficiently.

You will be asked to make an appointment at the endoscopy unit for this test at a date and time that suits you.

### **Colonoscopy**

This is a camera test (endoscopy) which allows us to look at your large bowel (colon) that will tell us if you have any problems within your large bowel that may be causing your anaemia. This test will also allow us to take small samples for assessment if necessary and to remove small polyps that may be identified by chance during the test

You will be asked to make an appointment at the endoscopy unit for this test at a date and time that suits you.

**If both of these tests are requested they will be performed at the same time.**

### **CT Colon with contrast**

This is a scan of your bowel performed at the radiology (X-ray) department. It provides very detailed pictures of your large bowel that can help diagnose the cause of your IDA. This is not a routine test for IDA and will only be requested in very specific circumstances.

Further details and preparation instructions will be sent with your appointment date.

### **CT chest abdomen and pelvis**

This is a whole body scan performed at the radiology (X-ray) department. This is not a routine test for IDA but may be requested in very specific circumstances.

## Small bowel capsule endoscopy

Capsule endoscopy is a test requested only if there is a need to view the lining of your small bowel beyond the reach of an endoscope (camera).

This is not a routine test for IDA and will only be requested if your anaemia does not improve with treatment or if you require recurrent blood transfusions

### The following tests have been requested for you

Gastroscopy and colonoscopy  
Gastroscopy  
Colonoscopy  
CT colon  
CT chest abdomen and pelvis  
Chest X-ray  
Blood tests  
Capsule endoscopy  
Iron infusion  
Other specify


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For most people these are the only tests needed to investigate iron deficiency anaemia. However, depending on the results of your tests you may need further investigation and if this is the case, you will be contacted explaining what the test is and why you need it.

### How is IDA treated?

In most people this condition can be treated simply and easily with a course of iron tablets. The length of time you take these tablets will be decided by regular blood checks organised by your GP. Large amounts of iron can be harmful so only take iron supplements as your GP prescribes.

For some people treatment with iron infusion may be more appropriate and this will be discussed with you by your clinician.

However, it is important that we also treat the cause of your anaemia to prevent it coming back.

### How can I increase the iron in my diet?

#### The following foods are good sources of iron:

- Dark green leafy vegetables such as watercress, spinach and curly kale.
- Brown rice.
- Pulses and beans.
- Nuts and seeds.
- White and red meat.
- Fish.
- Eggs.
- Dried fruit.

**The following can have a negative impact on iron absorption and intake should be reduced or avoided if possible:**

- Tea.
- Coffee.
- Calcium - e.g. dairy products such as milk – **Do not stop prescribed calcium supplements**
- Indigestion medicines
- Wholegrain cereal.

**We do not need to see you at this clinic again**

- When you leave clinic today our clinic clerk will give you an appointment for the telephone results clinic.
- This will be approximately ten weeks after your clinic appointment.
- This allows time for all of your results to be available to us
- Your appointment will tell you the date and time that the specialist nurse will ring you with your results.

**Please ensure the clinic clerk has the correct phone number on which to contact you**

You will also receive a copy of the results letter sent to your GP letter which will explain:

- how often to have your blood tests repeated to check that your anemia is resolving with treatment
- when to stop taking your iron tablets
- If or when you should be referred for further investigation.

If your investigation results show a problem which requires further specialist treatment you will be informed before your follow up appointment either:

- immediately after your endoscopy
- by telephone call
- by letter.

**Please do not contact your GP for your test results.** Your GP will only receive the results at the same time as you.

**Further Information:**

**If you have any questions or problems please contact:**

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