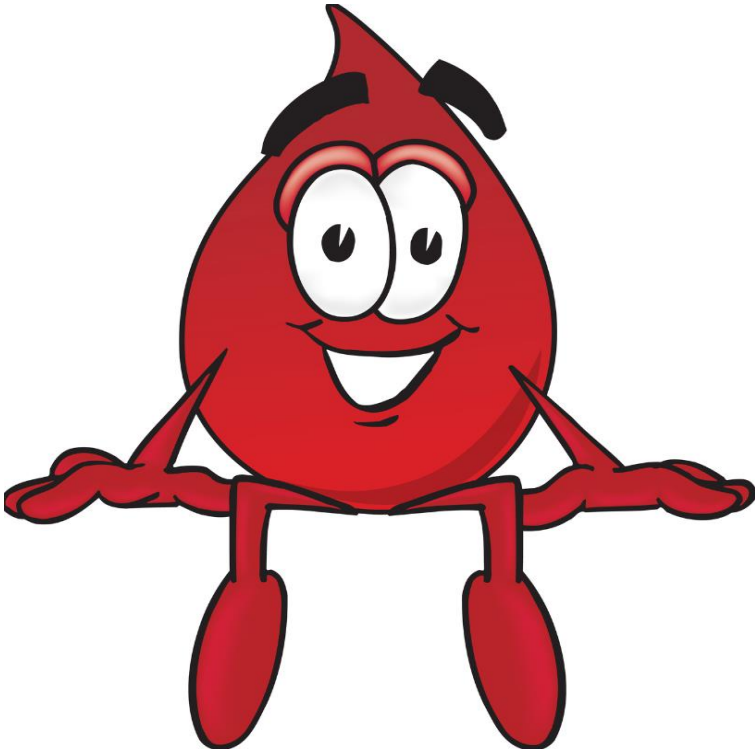


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# Anemia in Surgery

What do I need to know?



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### **What is Anemia?**

Anemia is a medical term which means that a person does not have enough red blood cells or hemoglobin in their body.

Hemoglobin is the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to all parts of the body. People with mild anemia may **not** have any symptoms or only mild symptoms.

Symptoms can include but are not limited to

- weakness,
- fatigue,
- shortness of breath,
- headache
- difficulty with thinking or concentration.

In order to confirm anemia a blood test is needed.

The good news is that most anemia is manageable. The sooner you find out if you are anemic the sooner you can start treatments to help.

### **So you have anemia? Why me?**

Anemia may be present before surgery in people who have chronic diseases or cancer.

The most common causes of anemia are:

1. not enough dietary iron,
2. blood loss such as heavy menstrual cycles, or GI blood loss disease
3. medications

Women (pregnancy, heavy periods), vegetarians and the elderly are at the highest risk for iron deficiency anemia.

### **What are the risks of untreated anemia in surgery patients?**

Patients who have anemia before surgery are more likely to need blood transfusions, have a higher risk of infection, and have longer hospital stays.

Appropriate management of anemia prior to surgery may be life-saving in some circumstances

### **How is Anemia treated?**

Treatment of anemia varies and depends on the cause. Health Care Providers will recommend treatment for each individual.

- **Iron Deficiency Anemia** - is treated with iron supplements. This may require several months (or longer) of treatment. If the underlying cause of iron deficiency is blood loss, the source of the bleeding must be located and controlled.
- **Vitamin Deficiency Anemia** - include pernicious anemia which is treated with vitamin B12 supplementation.
- **Anemia of Chronic Disease** - there is no specific treatment for this type of anemia. Doctors focus on treating the underlying disease. In the pre-operative patient, injections of erythropoietin may be beneficial.
- **Other anemia's** - other types exist and require the expertise of blood specialist doctors (Hematologists).

**“I’m told my anemia can’t be treated, now what do I do?”**

There may be other options to help you avoid a blood transfusion. Please consult your Blood Management Service Nurse Coordinator for a consultation for your blood management plan.