

# Best Diet Plan for Anemia



Medically reviewed by [Kathy W. Warwick, RDN, CDCES](#), Nutrition — Written by Annette McDermott — [Updated on May 5, 2023](#)

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Eating a healthy diet that's rich in iron, B vitamins, and vitamin C is important if you have iron-deficiency or vitamin-deficiency anemia. Good food sources of these nutrients include leafy greens, meat and poultry, seafood, nuts and seeds, and beans.



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blood cells, or your body's inability to create enough red blood cells.

There are many types of anemia. The most common type is [iron deficiency anemia](#).

Red blood cells contain a protein called hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is full of iron. Without sufficient iron, your body can't make the hemoglobin it needs to create enough red blood cells to deliver oxygen-rich blood throughout your body.

A lack of [folate](#) and [vitamin B-12](#) may also impact your body's ability to make red blood cells. If your body can't process B-12 properly, you may develop [pernicious anemia](#).

A diet rich in iron, B vitamins, and vitamin C like the plan below is important if you have anemia. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about supplements as well.

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## Anemia diet plan

Anemia treatment plans often include dietary changes. The best diet plan for anemia includes foods rich in iron and other vitamins essential to hemoglobin and red blood cell production. It should also include foods that help your body absorb iron better.

There are two types of iron in foods: heme iron and nonheme iron.

Heme iron is found in meat, poultry, and seafood. Nonheme iron is found

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The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for iron is 10 milligrams (mg) for men and 12 mg for women.

Although anemia treatment plans are individualized, most require **150 to 200 mg** of elemental iron daily. You'll likely need to take prescription iron or an over-the-counter iron supplement until your levels are replenished.

Add these foods to your diet to get more iron and help fight iron deficiency anemia:

## 1. Leafy greens

Leafy greens, especially dark ones, are among the best sources of nonheme iron. They include:

- spinach
- kale
- collard greens
- dandelion greens
- Swiss chard

Some leafy greens such as Swiss chard and collard greens also contain folate. A diet low in folate may cause folate deficiency anemia. Citrus fruits, beans, and whole grains are good sources of folate.

When eating dark, leafy greens for iron, there's a catch. Some greens high in iron, such as spinach and kale, are also high in oxalates. Oxalates can bind with iron, preventing the absorption of nonheme iron.

So while it's beneficial to eat your greens as part of an overall anemia diet, don't depend on them solely to treat the condition.

Vitamin C helps your stomach absorb iron. Eating leafy greens with foods that contain vitamin C such as oranges, red peppers, and strawberries may increase iron absorption. Some greens are good sources of both iron and vitamin C, such as collard greens and Swiss chard.

## 2. Meat and poultry

All meat and poultry contain heme iron. Red meat, lamb, and venison are the best sources. Poultry and chicken have lower amounts.

Eating meat or poultry with nonheme iron foods, such as leafy greens, along with a vitamin C-rich fruit can increase iron absorption.

## 3. Liver

Many people shy away from organ meats, but they're a great source of iron.

Liver is arguably the most popular organ meat. It's rich in iron and folate. Some other iron-rich organ meats are heart, kidney, and beef tongue.

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## 4. Seafood

Some seafood provides heme iron. Shellfish such as oysters, clams, scallops, crabs, and shrimp are good sources. Most fish contain iron.

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- canned or fresh tuna
- mackerel
- mahi mahi
- pompano
- fresh perch
- fresh or canned salmon

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Although canned sardines are good sources of iron, they're also high in calcium.

Calcium may bind with iron and reduces its absorption. Foods high in calcium shouldn't be eaten at the same time as iron-rich foods.

Other examples of calcium-rich foods include:

- dairy milk
- fortified plant milks
- yogurt
- kefir
- cheese
- tofu

## 5. Fortified foods

Many foods are fortified with iron. Add these foods to your diet if you're a vegetarian or struggle to eat other sources of iron:

- fortified orange juice
- fortified ready-to-eat cereals
- foods made from fortified refined flour such as white bread
- fortified pasta
- foods made from fortified cornmeal

## 6. Beans

Beans are good sources of iron for vegetarians and meat eaters alike. They're also inexpensive and versatile.

Some iron-rich options are:

- kidney beans
- chickpeas
- soybeans
- black-eyed peas
- pinto beans
- black beans
- peas
- lima beans

[Shop for canned beans.](#)

## 7. Nuts and seeds

Many types of nuts and seeds are good sources of iron. They taste great on their own or sprinkled on salads or [yogurt](#).

Some nuts and seeds that contain iron are:

- pumpkin seeds
- cashews
- pistachios
- hemp seeds
- pine nuts
- sunflower seeds

Find [raw pumpkin seeds](#), [raw cashews](#), and [raw pine nuts](#) online.

Both raw and roasted nuts have similar amounts of iron.

your iron levels that much.

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## Takeaway

No single food will cure anemia. But eating an overall healthy diet rich in dark, leafy greens, nuts and seeds, seafood, meat, beans, and vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables can help you get the iron you need to manage anemia.

Be sure to discuss supplements with your healthcare provider because it's difficult to get enough iron from diet alone.

A cast iron skillet is an anemia diet plan staple. Foods cooked in cast iron absorb iron from the skillet. Acidic foods absorb the most iron, and foods cooked for short periods of time absorb the least.

When following a diet plan for anemia, remember these guidelines:

- **Don't eat iron-rich foods with foods or beverages that block iron absorption.** These include coffee or tea, eggs, foods high in oxalates, and foods high in calcium.
- **Eat iron-rich foods with vitamin C-rich foods,** such as oranges, tomatoes, or strawberries, to improve absorption.
- **Eat iron-rich foods with foods that contain beta carotene,** such as apricots, red peppers, and beets, to improve absorption.
- **Eat a variety of heme and nonheme iron foods** throughout the day to up your iron intake.

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- **Add foods rich in folate and vitamin B-12** to support red blood cell production.

Last medically reviewed on June 26, 2020

## How we reviewed this article:

 **SOURCES**  **HISTORY**

Our experts continually monitor the health and wellness space, and we update our articles when new information becomes available.

### **Current Version**

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# What Is Severe Aplastic Anemia?



Medically reviewed by [Avi Varma, MD, MPH, AAHIVS, FAAFP](#) — Written by [Daniel Yetman](#) on January 23, 2024

[Severe aplastic anemia symptoms](#)   [Causes](#)   [Risk factors](#)  
[Complications](#)   [Diagnosis](#)   [Is there a cure?](#)   [Treatment](#)  
[Getting medical help](#)   [Outlook](#)   [Summary](#)

Severe aplastic anemia is a rare blood disorder where an autoimmune reaction leads to your bone marrow not producing enough blood cells.

Depending on the severity of aplastic anemia symptoms, doctors classify it as:

- non-severe
- severe
- very severe

Newer treatments like bone marrow transplants and immunosuppressant medications have vastly increased survival rates and quality of life for people with severe aplastic anemia. People with untreated severe aplastic anemia tend to have very poor outlooks.

Researchers still don't fully understand why aplastic anemia develops. It's believed to be related to an autoimmune reaction against the cells in your bone marrow that produce blood cells.

Read on to learn more about this rare disorder, including symptoms, causes, and treatment options.

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## What are the symptoms of severe aplastic anemia?

People with severe aplastic anemia have low levels of:

- red blood cells
- white blood cells
- platelets

Most symptoms of aplastic anemia are related to low levels of these three types of blood cells.

Potential symptoms include:

- fatigue
- persistent infections
- bruising and bleeding easier than usual
- shortness of breath
- weakness
- nosebleeds
- bleeding gums
- paleness
- headaches
- fever
- dizziness
- a fast heart rate or irregular heartbeat
- red or purple spots on your skin (purpura)

## Severe aplastic anemia causes

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In about [two-thirds](#) ✓ of cases, the cause of aplastic anemia isn't known. When the underlying cause isn't known, it's called [idiopathic aplastic anemia](#).

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white blood cell (a T-cell) attacks stem cells in your bone marrow that produce blood cells.

This autoimmune reaction may be triggered by a combination of genetics and environment.

About [70% of aplastic anemia cases](#) ✓ are thought to be acquired, meaning they're triggered by environmental factors like:

- medications, such as some chemotherapy medications
- toxic chemicals
- viral infections like viral hepatitis

The remaining 30% of cases are thought to be hereditary, meaning they're linked to genes passed through families.

The most common hereditary cause is [Fanconi anemia](#). Fanconi anemia is usually a recessive disease caused by mutations in the FANC gene, but about [2% of cases](#) ✓ develop from a gene mutation on the X chromosome. "Recessive" means you need an associated mutation from both parents to develop the disease.

Severe aplastic anemia can develop at [any age](#) ✓, and it occurs in all sexes about equally. [Some research](#) ✓ reports a slightly higher occurrence in males.

It's thought to affect about [1 in 430,000](#) ✓ people in Europe and the United States and about 3 times more people in East Asia.

Other potential risk factors include:

- family history
- prior [chemotherapy](#)
- [exposure to](#) ✓ some pesticides and insecticides

## Potential complications of severe aplastic anemia

Severe aplastic anemia can lead to complications like:

- bleeding
- frequent or severe infections
- developing [myelodysplastic syndrome](#) or [leukemia](#)
- an [irregular heartbeat](#)
- [heart failure](#)

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## How is severe aplastic anemia diagnosed?

Doctors use a variety of tests to diagnose aplastic anemia and rule out

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Tests include:

- blood tests, such as:
  - [complete blood count](#)
  - [blood smear](#)
  - folate or vitamin B12 test
  - erythropoietin test
- [bone marrow biopsy](#), where a doctor takes a small sample of your bone marrow
- imaging tests like [magnetic resonance imaging \(MRI\)](#)

Doctors can also use the results of these tests to determine the severity of your aplastic anemia. [Factors](#) ✓ that determine the severity of aplastic anemia include your:

- number of functioning bone marrow stem cells
- neutrophil (a type of white blood cell) count
- platelet count
- reticulocyte (immature red blood cell) count

## Is severe aplastic anemia curable?

In recent years, researchers have developed [stem cell transplants](#) as a [potential cure](#) ✓ for aplastic anemia. A stem cell transplant involves injecting stem cells from the bone marrow of a donor to replace your own stem cells.

## Severe aplastic anemia treatment

Researchers have developed [clearer treatment guidelines](#) ✓ for severe aplastic anemia than non-severe.

The standard first-line therapy for a person with severe aplastic anemia is usually a stem cell transplant. The stem cells come from a genetically compatible donor. The donor is often a close relative, but it can also be a stranger.

If a suitable donor isn't available for a bone marrow transplant or if you're not a candidate, immunosuppressants are generally used as the primary treatment to stop the autoimmune reaction.

Immunosuppressants you might receive include:

- equine antithymocyte globulin
- cyclosporin A

It's still **not fully understood** ✓ why these medications reduce symptoms in some people with aplastic anemia.

People who don't respond to these medications **might receive** ✓ eltrombopag. This medication may also be combined with equine antithymocyte globulin or cyclosporin A.

## When to contact a doctor

The symptoms of aplastic anemia can be vague, especially in the early stages. But it's important to see your doctor if you develop potential signs, such as:

- unexplained weight loss
- fatigue
- bleeding or bruising
- purple dots on your skin

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