

Overview

Haemochromatosis

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Haemochromatosis is an inherited condition (passed on from your parents). It causes iron to build up in your body over many years.

This buildup of iron is also called an iron overload. It can cause unpleasant symptoms. If it is not treated, it can damage your liver, joints, pancreas and heart.

Symptoms of haemochromatosis

You usually start to show symptoms of haemochromatosis between age 30 and 60.

Common symptoms include:

- feeling very tired all the time (fatigue)
- weight loss
- weakness
- joint pain
- not being able to get or keep an erection ([erectile dysfunction](#))
- [irregular periods](#) or [missing periods](#)

[Symptoms of haemochromatosis](#)

Speak to a GP if you have:

- long-lasting or worrying symptoms of haemochromatosis
- a parent or sibling with haemochromatosis, even if you do not have symptoms

Diagnosing haemochromatosis

Haemochromatosis is usually diagnosed with blood tests.

If the blood tests show there's a problem, you will usually be referred to a hospital specialist.

You may need more tests to check if haemochromatosis has caused any organ damage.

[Diagnosing haemochromatosis](#)

Causes of haemochromatosis

Haemochromatosis is caused by a faulty gene that affects how your body absorbs iron from your food.

You can get haemochromatosis if both your parents have the faulty gene and you inherit 1 copy of the faulty gene from each parent.

You will not get haemochromatosis if you only inherit 1 copy of the faulty gene from 1 parent. But there's a chance you could pass the faulty gene to your children.

Even if you inherit 2 copies of the faulty gene, you may not get haemochromatosis. Only a small number of people with 2 copies of this faulty gene will get haemochromatosis. The reason for this is not known.

[Causes of haemochromatosis](#)

Treatments for haemochromatosis

There is no cure for haemochromatosis.

But there are treatments that can:

- reduce the amount of iron in the body
- lower the risk of damage to your organs and joints

The most effective way to manage haemochromatosis is venesection (phlebotomy). This is a procedure to remove some of your blood.

You do not need to make any big changes to your diet to control your iron levels if you're having treatment.

[Treating haemochromatosis](#)

Complications of haemochromatosis

If haemochromatosis is not diagnosed and treated early, the iron buildup in your body can cause serious problems.

These include:

- liver problems - such as scarring of the liver (cirrhosis) or liver cancer
- [diabetes](#)
- arthritis
- heart failure

[Complications of haemochromatosis](#)

Support

If you have been diagnosed or are living with haemochromatosis, you can get support from the [Irish Haemochromatosis Association](#).

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