

## Iron deficiency in Women aged 55 years or younger

**Thank you for coming for your blood test. We have found your blood iron levels to be low. Common causes of low iron levels are 1) not taking in enough iron in your diet, and 2) losing too much iron because of heavy menstrual periods.**

Our body needs iron to make healthy red blood cells, which are important for carrying oxygen around the body. In some people with low iron, the body is not able to make new red blood cells and so the number of red blood cells is low. This is called anaemia. Not all people with low iron will develop anaemia. Some people who have a poor diet with just enough iron to get by, may slip into anaemia if other factors develop. For example, a barely adequate diet combined with a growth spurt in children, or with a pregnancy or with heavy periods may lead to anaemia.

We usually get the iron we need from our diet. Iron can be found in meat, liver, green vegetables, flour, eggs and other foods.

### What symptoms might I get?

Most people with low iron levels will have no symptoms. However, if you do develop anaemia you might develop some symptoms such as tiredness, lethargy, feeling faint and becoming breathless easily. You may look pale.

Less common symptoms include headaches, irregular heartbeats (palpitations), altered taste, sore mouth and ringing in the ears (tinnitus).

### What is the treatment for iron-deficiency?

Iron tablets are usually prescribed to correct the deficiency. If you are anaemic the iron tablets will correct this too.

The doctor has issued a prescription for some iron tablets to take daily for 3 months. If you are registered for electronic prescribing the prescription will automatically go to your nominated pharmacy. If you are not registered for electronic prescribing the prescription will be waiting for you to collect from your usual Ridge surgery. Please let us know if you think you may be allergic to this treatment before using it.

Some people have side-effects when taking iron. These include: feeling sick (nausea), an upset stomach, constipation, or diarrhoea. You should tell a doctor if side-effects are a problem. Don't stop the iron or the anaemia will not get better. Possible ways to reduce the problem with side-effects are:

- Taking the iron tablets with meals. Food reduces the absorption of the iron and so you may need to take a longer course to correct the anaemia.
- Taking a lower dose, but again a longer course will be needed to correct the anaemia.
- Drinking plenty of fluids if constipation develops.
- Iron tablets may make your stools black. This is normal and nothing to worry about.

More information can be found on the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)