

## Anemia

Anemia is a lack of red blood cells.

Red blood cells carry oxygen to the body. When the body does not have enough red blood cells, the heart beats harder to get oxygen. This can cause damage to your organs. Anemia is more common in women than men.

### Symptoms

When the body works harder to get oxygen, it affects how you feel. You may feel tired, weak, or short of breath when you are active.

The lack of oxygen may make you feel moody, dizzy or light-headed. You also may be confused at times.

Other symptoms can be:

- Lack of interest in sex
- Pale skin
- A ringing noise in your ears
- You may crave odd things to eat. This could be ice, clay, cardboard, raw starch or foods that crunch. This is called pica.

### Causes and Risk Factors

Some HIV meds, such as AZT, raise the risk of anemia. An infection can kill red blood cells. It can change how many red blood cells the body makes.

Anemia can also be caused by:

- Loss of blood
- HIV and other infections

A diet that does not have enough iron or certain B vitamins can lead to anemia. You can prevent anemia when you eat foods that are high in iron. Some iron-rich foods are liver, shellfish, beans, tofu and spinach,

### How to Know You Have Anemia

A doctor may ask questions about your past health problems and go over the meds you take. You will be given a blood test to count the red blood cells in your blood.

### Treatment

When you treat anemia you can live a longer and better life. Treatment for anemia is much the same for people who have HIV and those who do not.

Your doctor may change your HIV treatment to help prevent anemia. In some cases, the HIV meds can prevent or improve anemia. They work to help the body fight any disease that can lead to anemia.

A balanced diet helps to avoid anemia. Your doctor may prescribe iron or vitamin B pills.

Sometimes, new blood needs to be added to your body. This is called a transfusion. It adds new healthy red blood cells to the blood.

#### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.