Iron deficiency anaemia

What is iron deficiency anaemia

Iron deficiency anaemia occurs when your body doesn't have enough iron to produce healthy red blood cells. Red blood cells carry oxygen around your body, so a lack of iron can leave you feeling tired, weak, and short of breath. It's a common condition that can often be treated effectively once the underlying cause is identified. At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we can help diagnose and manage iron deficiency anaemia, ensuring you receive the care you need.

What causes iron deficiency anaemia?

Iron deficiency anaemia happens when your body's iron levels drop too low. This can be caused by:

- **Blood loss** the most common cause, which may occur due to heavy periods, gastrointestinal bleeding (e.g., ulcers, haemorrhoids, or inflammation), or surgery
- **Dietary insufficiency** not eating enough iron-rich foods such as red meat, leafy greens, or fortified cereals
- **Increased demand** during pregnancy or periods of rapid growth, your body needs more iron
- **Malabsorption** conditions like coeliac disease or Crohn's disease can affect your body's ability to absorb iron from food
- **Long-term use of certain medications** such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), which reduce stomach acid and may impair iron absorption

What are the symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia?

The symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia can vary depending on its severity but often include:

- Fatigue or feeling unusually tired
- Weakness or lack of energy
- Shortness of breath, particularly during physical activity
- Pale skin or a pale appearance inside your lower eyelids
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Heart palpitations (feeling like your heart is racing or fluttering)
- Brittle nails or hair loss
- Cravings for non-food substances, such as ice or dirt (a condition known as pica)

If you're experiencing these symptoms, it's important to seek medical advice, as untreated anaemia can lead to complications.

How is iron deficiency anaemia investigated?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use a combination of medical history, symptoms, and tests to diagnose iron deficiency anaemia and identify its cause. Tests may include:

- **Blood tests** to measure haemoglobin levels, iron levels, and markers of iron stores in your body
- **Upper GI endoscopy** a thin, flexible tube with a camera is used to examine your oesophagus, stomach, and small intestine to look for potential sources of bleeding, such as ulcers
- **Colonoscopy** an examination of your large intestine to check for any bleeding or abnormalities, such as polyps or inflammation
- **Stool tests** to detect hidden blood in your stool, which may indicate bleeding in the digestive tract

How is iron deficiency anaemia treated?

Treatment depends on the underlying cause of the anaemia. Common treatments include:

- **Iron supplements** usually in tablet form, these are prescribed to boost your iron levels. Liquid iron may be used for those who have difficulty swallowing tablets
- **Dietary changes** increasing your intake of iron-rich foods such as lean meats, spinach, beans, and fortified cereals can help improve your iron levels. Vitamin C-rich foods like oranges and tomatoes can also aid iron absorption
- **Addressing underlying causes** if your anaemia is caused by gastrointestinal bleeding, inflammation, or other conditions, these will need to be treated to prevent recurrence
- **Intravenous (IV) iron therapy** for severe anaemia or when oral supplements aren't effective, iron can be given directly into a vein
- **Surgery** if the cause of bleeding is identified (e.g., a polyp or ulcer), surgery or other procedures may be required to stop the bleeding

Can iron deficiency anaemia be prevented?

While not all cases can be prevented, you can reduce your risk by:

- Eating a balanced diet rich in iron and vitamin C
- Treating any underlying medical conditions that affect iron absorption
- Speaking to your doctor about iron supplements if you're at higher risk, such as during pregnancy
- Regular check-ups and monitoring if you have a history of anaemia or digestive conditions

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating the underlying causes of iron deficiency anaemia. Using state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and a patient-centred approach, we work to ensure you receive the care and support you need to restore your health and prevent future issues.

Contact us

If you're experiencing symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia or have concerns about your digestive health, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can help you feel better and improve your quality of life.