Anaemia due to an under-production of red cells can have different causes including:

Most commonly a shortage of iron
Iron deficiency anaemia is caused by a lack of iron in the body. There might be a problem with not having enough iron in your diet, in absorbing it from your diet or you might have used it all up during pregnancy, surgery or bleeding.

A shortage of folate or vitamin B12 deficiency:
Folate is a type of B vitamin found naturally in certain foods like green leafy vegetables.
Women who don't eat meat, dairy and eggs have a greater risk of developing vitamin B12 deficiency.
Less commonly the body may not be able to absorb B12. For example, in pernicious anaemia and coeliac disease.

What treatment is available?
There are several different types of treatment available which might include oral tablets, intravenous infusion or injections and blood transfusion.
If you are prescribed iron tablets, the iron is absorbed best when taken with vitamin C for example in fruit juice and less when taken with tannins such as in tea.

What tests are done to see if I am anaemic?

- Full Blood Count – checks the number and quality of red cells in your blood including the Haemoglobin
- Vitamin B12 and folate levels – checks to see if you have enough iron in your body to help make red cells
- Ferritin level – checks the amount of iron you have in store
- Thalassaemia or Sickle Cell blood tests, looking for genetically faulty red cells in at risk groups

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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NHS
Torbay and South Devon
NHS Foundation Trust

PATIENT INFORMATION

Anaemia in Pregnancy

Working with you, for you

What is anaemia?

Anaemia is usually the result of either not having enough red cells to take oxygen around the body, or having faulty red cells that are unable to carry enough oxygen. It is measured in the blood by the level of Haemoglobin, sometimes called ‘Hb’.

Blood is a complex fluid containing lots of proteins and a number of different types of cell to help our body to function correctly. These include white cells to help fight infection, platelets to help form clots when we bleed and red cells to carry oxygen.

Oxygen is carried by the red cells to all our organs, such as the heart and muscles, to help them convert food into energy for the body to work. Red blood cells last about 120 days so the body (bone marrow) has to constantly make new ones to replace them.

Can I help myself?

There are several things you can do. These include:

- Eat a healthy diet including fruit, vegetables, eggs, fish or meat and carbohydrates such as potatoes, pasta, rice or bread.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse or midwife if you think you have any of the symptoms of anaemia listed in this leaflet or have noticed blood in your bowel motions or urine or have had persistent heavy periods before pregnancy.
- Always discuss any alternative medicine, herbal preparation or over the counter treatments for anaemia with a healthcare professional before taking them, as they may react with any prescribed medications or be insufficient for your needs

What happens in pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your body produces more blood to support the growth of your baby. If you're not getting enough iron or B vitamins your body might not be able to produce the amount of red blood cells it needs to contribute to this additional blood.

It's normal to have mild anaemia due to natural dilution in pregnancy. But you may have more severe anaemia from low iron or vitamin levels or from other reasons.

Anaemia can leave you feeling tired and weak. If it is severe but goes untreated, it can increase your risk of serious complications like preterm delivery and need for blood transfusion. Good iron levels in the mother are also important for breast fed babies to get their iron needs.

What are the signs and symptoms of anaemia?

The following can be features of anaemia:

- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Fast or irregular heartbeat
- Pounding or “whooshing” in your ears
- Headache
- Cold hands or feet
- Pale or yellow skin
- Chest pain
- Lack of concentration