

# National Cancer Institute

at the National Institutes of Health

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## Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects

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### Anemia

To order free copies of this fact sheet, please call 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER).

#### What is anemia?

Anemia is when your body doesn't have enough red blood cells. Having anemia can make you feel very tired or weak.

#### Call your doctor or nurse if you feel:

- Dizzy or faint
- Short of breath
- Very weak and tired
- Your heart beating very fast

#### Try these tips when you feel tired or weak:

##### Save your energy.

Choose the most important things to do each day.

##### Ask for help.

When family or friends offer to help, let them. They can take you to the doctor, buy groceries, or make meals.

##### Balance rest with activity.

Take short naps during the day. Short naps of less than 1 hour are best. Too much bed rest can make you feel weak.

Sleep at least 8 hours every night.

You may feel better if you take short walks or exercise a little every day.



"I told my doctor that I was very tired. My doctor did blood tests to check for anemia. Now I am getting treatment for the anemia, and I have a lot more energy."



**Eat and drink well.**

Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn what foods and drinks are best for you.

You may need to eat **high-protein** foods. Meat, peanut butter, and eggs are good choices.

You may need to eat foods with **iron**. Red meat, leafy greens (such as collard greens and spinach), and cooked dried beans are good choices.

Most people need to drink at least 8 cups of liquid every day. Water and juice with extra water added are good choices.



**Your doctor or nurse will order blood tests. If you have anemia, you may need medicine. Or you may need a blood transfusion to help you feel better.**

**Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:**

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What is causing the anemia?
3. Would taking medicine, iron pills, or getting a blood transfusion help me?
4. Can you give me the name of a nutritionist, so I can learn more about what foods might help?

**Free Services to Learn More**

**National Cancer Institute  
Cancer Information Service**

**Phone:** 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

**TTY:** 1-800-332-8615

**Chat Online:** [www.cancer.gov/help](http://www.cancer.gov/help)

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/chemo-side-effects>