

### What is low red blood count or anemia?

Anemia is a condition caused by a low level of healthy red blood cells (RBCs). Cancer and its treatment can lower the number of RBCs and hemoglobin level in the blood. Hemoglobin is the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen. When hemoglobin levels are low, body tissues don't get enough oxygen and cannot work properly.

Symptoms of anemia include:

- Fatigue
- Lack of energy
- Pale skin
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Increased or irregular heart rate
- Low blood pressure
- Chest pain
- Poor appetite
- Feeling cold or chilled
- Headache

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### What can I do to help my anemia?

#### 1. Receive treatment

Once the cause of anemia is known, your healthcare team can suggest ways to treat it. Treatments will depend on the cause of anemia.

Supplements:

- Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help correct low levels of iron, vitamin B12 or folic acid
- Take iron pills or other medicines as prescribed by your doctor

Blood transfusions:

- You may need blood transfusions to lessen symptoms such as shortness of breath
- More than one blood transfusion may be needed

Medications:

- There are medicines that work to increase Red Blood Cell production
- Not all medicines work for everyone. Talk to your doctor.

## 2. Learn to rest

It is very important to rest when your red blood cell count is low.

Try these tips:

- Get plenty of rest to keep up energy levels and help you cope with anemia and its effects
- Avoid strenuous or long periods of activity
- Limit activities that make you short of breath or make your heart beat faster
- Take rest breaks throughout the day
- Do the activities that are most important to you
- Move slowly to avoid getting dizzy
- When you get out of bed, sit on the side of the bed for a while before standing up
- Ask others for help

## 3. Eat & drink well

Eating a well-balanced meal and drinking lots of fluids will give you the energy you need to heal.

These tips will help you eat and drink well:

- Eat a balanced diet that include foods high in iron
- These foods include green leafy vegetables, liver and cooked red meats
- Drink plenty of water
- Limit your intake of coffee and alcohol

The information presented was gathered from CCS and ChemoCare.