

# Anemia (low RBC count)

## What is anemia?

Anemia (ah-NEE-mee-ah) is another word for too few red blood cells (RBCs). Red blood cells carry oxygen from the lungs to every part of the body. When there are too few red blood cells, your muscles and organs cannot get enough oxygen to work properly, leading to symptoms that affect your quality of life.

Anemia is a common side effect experienced by 70% to 90% of patients during the course of their cancer treatment.

## Why does cancer treatment cause anemia?

- Chemotherapy works by destroying cancer cells. It may also damage healthy cells, including red blood cells, and can reduce the bone marrow's ability to make enough red blood cells
- Other side effects can also affect your body's ability to make red blood cells, such as decreased appetite, nausea, and vomiting
- Anemia due to chemotherapy is usually temporary

## What effect can anemia have on me?

Besides feeling very weak and tired, you may experience the following symptoms:

- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches or dizziness
- Difficulty sleeping or staying warm
- Difficulty concentrating

## How will I know I have anemia due to my treatments?

- Your doctor or nurse will test your blood often during treatment to determine if you have anemia. If the number of red blood cells is considered low, your doctor may suggest different treatment options
  - She or he may prescribe a medicine that can boost the production of your red blood cells

## What can I do if I have anemia?<sup>1</sup>

- Get plenty of rest. Take naps during the day if you can
- Limit your daily activities. Do what is most important to you
- Do light exercises. Take short walks, whenever you can
- Eat a well-balanced diet that contains all the nutrients your body needs
- Drink plenty of fluids
- When sitting or lying down, get up slowly to prevent dizziness

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Talk to your doctor or nurse about any symptoms you may have so you can receive proper treatment and start feeling better. Make sure you always inform them of any changes in your diet.*

**The information contained herein is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.**