

Anaemia

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Symptoms

Pale complexion, breathlessness on exertion. This can result in fatigue due to poor oxygen supply to the body's cells.

Causes

[Anaemia](#) [1] A lower than normal number of red blood cells. develops when the body doesn't have enough red blood cells or their structure is altered and impeded in the body. It may result from HIV itself, from HIV [antiviral](#) [2] A medication or substance which is active against one or more viruses. May include anti-HIV drugs, but these are more accurately termed antiretrovirals. drugs, or from drugs used to treat or prevent opportunistic infections. It affects one out of every four HIV-positive people and 5–10% of people taking AZT. Anaemia may also be the result of certain viral and bacterial illnesses. Inadequate diet or gut disturbance problems which affect the absorption of iron in the diet may be associated with anaemia.

Complementary & Supportive Therapy

Diet and dietary supplements: If iron deficiency is the cause of the anaemia, iron supplements or eating iron-rich foods such as red meat, fish, eggs, poultry, dried beans, lentils, green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds, wholegrain breads and cereals may help. Eating vitamin C rich foods such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, broccoli, rockmelon/cantaloupe and strawberries in the same meal can increase iron absorption. Iron absorption may be reduced by the tannins in tea, coffee and red wine.

HIV itself commonly causes vitamin B12 deficiency. Vitamin B12 supplements or foods containing this vitamin such as meat, fish, chicken, eggs and fortified products such as soy milks and some breakfast cereals can assist. Vitamin B12 deficiency is often accompanied by folate deficiency so folic acid supplements may also be useful.

If haemoglobin levels remain low and it is possible that this is due to your HIV medications, then your doctor will stop the drug that is likely to be causing the anaemia. In severe cases a blood transfusion may be necessary and sometimes erythropoietin (e.g. Procrit/Eporex) may be prescribed.

Special Precautions & Considerations

- Causes of anaemia can be complex, so seek medical advice and assessment first.

[◀ Fatigue](#) [3] [up](#) [4] [Night sweats](#) ▶ [5]

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/402>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/123>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/managing-side-effects/fatigue>

[4] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/managing-side-effects/managing-common-side-effects>

[5] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/managing-side-effects/night-sweats>