



ANEMIA, FOLIC ACID DEFICIENCY

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Anemia that is caused by a deficiency of folic acid. It is often occurs along with iron-deficiency anemia.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue and weakness.
- Red, sore tongue.
- Mouth ulcers.
- Pale skin, gums, eyes, and nailbeds.
- Shortness of breath.
- Irritability.
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (rare).
- Numbness and tingling of fingers and toes.

CAUSES

- Complication of pregnancy. A woman's body needs eight times more folic acid than usual during pregnancy.
- Not enough intake or absorption of foods with a high folic acid content. These include meat, poultry, fish, cheese, milk, eggs, green vegetables, and yeast.
- Excess alcohol use.
- Overcooking foods, which destroys folic acid.
- Deficiency of vitamin B12 or vitamin C.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Adults over 60.
- Pregnancy.
- Recent surgery.
- Illness such as tropical sprue, psoriasis, acne rosacea, eczema, or dermatitis herpetiformis.
- Fad diets or general poor nutrition.
- Chronic illness.
- Surgical removal of a portion of the stomach.
- Smoking, which decreases vitamin C absorption. Vitamin C is needed for folic acid absorption.
- Use of certain drugs, such as oral contraceptives, anticonvulsants, methotrexate, triamterene, or sulfasalazine.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't drink alcohol.
- Have regular medical checkups during pregnancy. Take prenatal vitamin supplements, if they are prescribed.
- Eat well. Include fresh vegetables, meat, and other animal proteins. Avoid fad diets. Don't

- overcook food.
- Don't smoke. Smoking increases vitamin requirements.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in three weeks with an adequate folic acid intake.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Infertility.
- Increased risk of infections.
- Congestive heart failure (severe cases only).
- Can increase the risk of conceiving a child with a neural tube defect.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. Medical tests may include blood studies, a Schilling test to measure vitamin B12 levels and a trial of taking vitamin B12.
- Treatment consists of folic acid supplements and treating any underlying causes.
- If you smoke, find a way to quit.
- If you take oral contraceptives, consider using another form of contraception.

MEDICATIONS

- Folic acid supplements will be prescribed.
- Iron supplements to take orally will be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Anemia does cause fatigue. Schedule regular rest periods until you are able to resume normal activity.

DIET

No special diet. Eat foods daily that are high in folic acid. The liver can store folic acid for a limited time only. Foods include asparagus spears, beef liver, broccoli spears, collards (cooked), mushrooms, oatmeal, peanut butter, red beans, and wheat germ.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of anemia.
- Symptoms don't improve in two weeks, despite treatment.
- Symptoms of infection (fever, chills, and muscle aches) occur during treatment.

