Hemochromatosis (Iron Overload)

You have *hemochromatosis. This is* when you have **too much iron in your body.** Iron is necessary in your body for many reasons. Iron works in the *hemoglobin* (a protein in red blood cells) which carries oxygen to your body. **However, too much iron can lead to long term health problems.** When the iron builds up in the body it affects the liver, heart, and pancreas. This can lead to heart failure, diabetes, *cirrhosis* (liver failure), cancer, impotence, and depression. Fatigue is a common complaint. Additional *symptoms* (problems) include headache, shortness of breath, heart irregularities and tanning skin. The most common cause of this disease is *hereditary* (passed from parents). Another cause is a diet that contains too much iron. This can happen to people who eat a lot of red meat, take supplemental iron, take vitamin C and drink alcohol. Frequent transfusions may also lead to iron overload.

DIAGNOSIS (LEARNING WHAT IS WRONG)

Three simple blood tests will usually make the diagnosis of hemochromatosis.

- A transferrin iron saturation percentage test will measure you ability to circulate iron.
- A ferritin test will measure the amount of iron you have in storage.
- A hemoglobin test will measure how much iron is circulating in your blood.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Follow the diet provided for you by your caregiver. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for iron is:

- 15 mg per day for women ages 12 to 49.
- 30 mg per day for women who are pregnant or lactating.
- 10 mg per day for men and women ages 50 and older.

It is important to follow your caregivers instructions because you can lead a normal life with treatment. If left untreated this disease can be fatal.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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