Anemia, Folic Acid Deficiency

Anemia is a condition in which there are not enough red blood cells to carry the necessary oxygen to the rest of the body. There are many causes for anemia like a vitamin deficiency or a folic acid deficiency. Folic acid deficiency is caused when there is not enough folic acid intake for the growth and formation of red blood cells. It occurs in pregnant women who do not take in enough folic acid compared to their increased needs in pregnancy. Vitamin deficiency anemia can lead to other health problems.

CAUSES

Folate (vitamin B-9, folic acid) deficiency is the main cause and can be do to:

- Not enough folate in your diet.
- You are not able to absorb folate in your small intestine because of intestinal disease or surgery.
- Excess alcohol intake. This affects absorption of folic acid.
- Certain medications can affect the absorption of folic acid.
- Over-cooking food. This destroys folic acid.

SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue and weakness.
- Mouth ulcers.
- Shortness of breath.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (rare).
- Red, sore mouth and tongue.
- Pale skin, gums, eyes and nail beds.
- Irritability.
- Numbness and tingling of fingers and toes.
- Weight loss.
- Confusion.
- Forgetfulness.
- Dizziness.
- Increase heart rate.
- Fainting.

SOME RISK FACTORS ARE:

- Advanced age.
- Recent surgery.
- Poor nutrition.
- Smoking.
- Pregnancy.
- Malabsorption problems (Crohn's or celiac disease of the intestine).
- Chronic illness.
- Surgical removal of a portion of the stomach and/or small intestine.
- Use of certain medications (anti-convulsion drugs).
- Excess alcohol intake.
- Chemotherapy.
- You are on kidney dialysis.
- Being on a vegetarian diet.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver may do a physical exam. Medical tests may include blood studies (a cbc shows anemia, large red blood cells below normal count, abnormal white blood cells and platelets). Blood tests can measure the amount of folate in the blood.

TREATMENT

With treatment, the condition will get well completely within a few weeks to a couple months. Take your vitamins as directed. It is recommended that adults take 400 micrograms of folate per day and should increase to 600micrograms/day in pregnancy or as your caregiver suggests.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Do not** drink alcohol or smoke.
- Have regular medical checkups during pregnancy. Take prenatal vitamin supplements, if they are prescribed.
- Eat a well balanced diet without over-cooking food.
- Take folic acid and iron supplements as told by your caregiver.
- Take your medications as told by your caregiver.
- Begin taking folic acid, 400mcg/day supplement before getting pregnant with approval from your caregiver.

- Take 600mcg of folic acid a day when you are pregnant or have an intestinal absorption problem.
- If you take birth control pills, find a different method of preventing pregnancy.
- Eat a well balanced diet which is high in folic acid. Some of these foods include:
  - Asparagus spears.
  - Collards (cooked).
  - Oatmeal.
  - Wheat germ.
  - Cereal and bread rich in grains.
  - Broccoli.
  - Red beans.
  - Fresh green vegetables.
  - Citrus fruits and juices.
  - Peas.

COMPLICATIONS

- Infertility.
- Increased risk of infections.
- Congestive heart failure (severe cases only).
- Increased risk of conceiving a child with a neural tube or spinal defects.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have any of the symptoms mentioned above.
- You have intestine absorption problems and want to get pregnant.
- You pass out (*faint*).

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