

HEALTH

Seniors More at Risk for Anemia: Know the Signs and Symptoms

NewsUSA

(NU) - It is estimated that one in 10 people over the age of 65 is anemic. Anemia is the most common blood disorder and a serious medical condition, although many patients may mistake its symptoms for daily fatigue and stress. In fact, many patients do not realize that they are anemic until they take a blood test.

Because anemia occurs when your body lacks sufficient healthy red blood cells to transport oxygen to your organs and tissues, it can make you feel tired and weak. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, pale or yellow skin, dizziness, cold hands or feet and headaches.

As people age, the risk of developing anemia increases. "While anemia can sometimes be the result of poor nutrition, it can also be a sign of a more serious underlying medical condition, such as cancer or kidney disease," says Nancy Berliner, M.D., president of the American Society of Hematology. "It is very important to consult your doctor if you suspect you are anemic, because even mild anemia may be linked to other diseases requiring treatment. Furthermore, in order to properly treat the anemia, it is important to understand what is causing it."

Nutritional anemia (when you do not have enough vitamins like folic acid in your diet) can be prevented by healthier eating habits. Look for iron-rich foods, like beef, dark green leafy vegetables, dried fruit and nuts. In addition, good sources of folic acid include citrus juice, legumes and fortified cereals. However, Dr. Berliner cautions that older adults should



Seniors and women are vulnerable to developing anemia, a condition in which the body lacks enough healthy red blood cells.

not take iron supplements unless instructed by a doctor.

"Iron deficiency anemia is almost always the result of blood loss, and it is important to understand the cause of the blood loss. Taking iron may temporarily fix the anemia, but it will also delay proper diagnosis of the real problem. Although iron deficiency is the most common cause of anemia worldwide, it accounts for less than one-third of anemia in elderly patients, and delay in seeking a doctor's opinion may delay the diagnosis of a more serious condition. The sooner you talk with your doctor, the sooner you can find out what is wrong and how to treat it," said Berliner.

If you are diagnosed with anemia, your doctor can determine your treatment and, depending on your condition, may refer you to a hematologist, a doctor who specializes in blood disorders.

For more information, visit www.bloodthevitalconnection.org.