the ranges, then you may be feeling worse than you should.

If you think you suffer from anemia, ask your healthcare provider to perform a simple blood test to check your hemoglobin count.

### Treating Anemia

The treatment of anemia varies greatly depending on the type. Your healthcare provider will help you determine the best treatment options, such as diet modification, nutritional supplements, or medication, if needed. Treatment for anemia associated with serious diseases tends to focus on addressing the underlying disease. But if anemia persists or symptoms worsen, treatment may reduce the risk of severe, possibly life-threatening complications and improve quality of life. Prescription treatments may be used to stimulate red blood cell production and help correct anemia.


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Anemia, one of the most common blood disorders, occurs when the number of healthy red blood cells decreases in the body. The disc-shaped red blood cells contain hemoglobin, a unique molecule that carries oxygen to the body’s tissues.

Anemia has many forms, each with its own cause. It can occur when the body produces too few red blood cells, loses too many, or if red blood cells are destroyed faster than they can be replaced. There are close to 100 different types of anemia with many causes, including certain diseases, vitamin or iron deficiencies, blood loss, genetic or acquired defects or disease, and side effects of medication.

If it is not treated, anemia may become worse and can lead to po-
tentially serious, even life-threatening complications. When the number of red blood cells decreases, the heart works harder, pumping more blood to send more oxygen throughout the body. If the heart works too hard, it can develop a rapid heartbeat (tachycardia) and/or another serious condition known as left ventricular hypertrophy, an enlargement of the heart muscle that can lead to heart failure.

Many types of anemia cannot be prevented. However, you can help avoid iron deficiency anemia and vitamin deficiency anemia by eating a healthy, varied diet that includes foods rich in iron, folate, and vitamin B₁₂. The best sources of iron are beef and other meats. Other foods rich in iron include beans, lentils, dark-green leafy vegetables, dried fruit, nuts, and seeds.

**Signs and Symptoms**
The most common sign of iron deficiency and other types of nutritional anemia is mild paleness of the skin, along with decreased pinkness of the lips, the lining of the eyelids, and the nail beds. A friend or relative who sees you only occasionally may be more likely to notice this than you because the changes usually occur gradually.

Other common signs of anemia may include:
- irritability
- fatigue
- dizziness, lightheadedness, and a rapid heartbeat
- weakness
- cognitive problems
- shortness of breath.

Depending on the condition causing the anemia, other signs and symptoms may occur:
- such as jaundice (yellow-tinged skin), dark tea-colored urine, easy bruising or bleeding, and enlargement of the spleen or liver.

In infants and preschool children, iron-deficiency anemia can result in developmental delays and behavioral disturbances, such as decreased motor activity and problems with social interaction and attention to tasks. Recent research studies indicate that behavioral problems may persist into and beyond school age if the iron deficiency is not properly treated.

Because the symptoms of anemia are easily confused with the symptoms of other conditions, it is important to see your healthcare provider for an evaluation if you are experiencing significant fatigue or other signs and symptoms listed above, or if you already have a serious disease.

**How is Anemia Diagnosed?**
Your healthcare provider can diagnose anemia with the help of a medical history, physical examination, and blood tests, including a complete blood count to measure levels of red blood cells and hemoglobin in the blood. On average, a normal hemoglobin range for adults should be between 12 and 18 g/dL (grams per deciliter of blood).

Anemia occurs when the number of red blood cells (or the hemoglobin in them) falls below these normal ranges and the body’s organs and tissues receive less oxygen than needed to function properly. Although “normal” is something that varies from person to person, if your numbers are below

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**Fast Fact**
The life span of a red blood cell is between 90 and 120 days. Old red blood cells are removed from the blood by the liver and spleen.

**Fast Fact**
Poor diet coupled with alcoholism is the most common cause of folate deficiency. Alcohol abuse not only contributes to malnutrition, but alcohol lowers folate levels.