What is anemia? Anemia happens when you don't have enough red blood cells or your red blood cells don't work as they should. Your red blood cells carry oxygen throughout your body. Oxygen powers your cells and gives you energy. Without healthy red blood cells that do their job, your body doesn't get the energy it needs to function. While some types of anemia are short-term and mild, others can last for a lifetime. Left untreated, anemia may be life-threatening. How does anemia affect my body? When someone develops anemia, they're said to be anemic, meaning they have symptoms of anemia, like being very tired or feeling cold all of the time. Anemia affects different people in different ways: Newborns: Some infants are born with low red blood cell counts. Most newborns don't need medical treatment for anemia, but some with severe anemia may need blood transfusions. Infants: Infants may get less iron than they need when they start eating solid food. That's because the iron in solid food isn't absorbed as easily as iron in breast milk or formula. Infants with anemia may appear lethargic. Children: Children do a lot of growing between birth and age 2. Children going through growth spurts need more iron. Children with anemia may develop related problems such as delayed development of motor skills and issues with learning. Women who are pregnant: Women who are pregnant may develop iron-deficiency anemia, which may increase the chance of complications such as premature birth or giving birth to babies with low birth weight. Women and people designated female at birth (DFAB): Women and people DFAB who have heavy periods (menstrual bleeding) or conditions like uterine fibroids may lose blood and develop anemia. People age 65 and older: People over 65 are more likely to have iron-poor diets and certain chronic diseases that increase their risk of developing anemia. If they develop anemia, they may have heart conditions or weakness that makes it hard for them to get around. They may have confusion or depression. People with chronic conditions: Some chronic conditions like autoimmune diseases or cancer may increase the risk of anemia. This is anemia of chronic disease. How common is this condition? Anemia is very common, affecting an estimated one-third of the global population and an estimated 3 million people in the United States. What are the types of anemia? There are many anemia types, each causing red blood cell levels to drop. Nutritional anemias Pernicious anemia: Pernicious anemia, one of the causes of vitamin B12 deficiency, is an autoimmune condition that prevents your body from absorbing vitamin B12. Iron-deficiency anemia: As its name implies, iron-deficiency anemia happens when your body doesn't have enough iron to make hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is the substance in your red blood cells that enables them to carry oxygen throughout your body. Megaloblastic anemia: Megaloblastic anemia is a type of vitamin deficiency anemia that happens when you don't get enough vitamin B12 and/or vitamin B9 (folate). Inherited anemias Sickle cell anemia: Sickle cell anemia changes your red blood cells' shape, turning round flexible discs into stiff and sticky sickle cells that block blood flow. Fanconi anemia: Fanconi anemia is a rare blood disorder. Anemia is one sign of Fanconi anemia. Diamond-Blackfan anemia: This inherited disorder keeps your bone marrow from making enough red blood cells. Anemias caused by abnormal red blood cells Hemolytic anemia: In this anemia, your red blood cells break down or die faster than usual. Aplastic anemia: This anemia happens when stem cells in your bone marrow don't make enough red blood cells. Autoimmune hemolytic anemia: In autoimmune hemolytic anemia, your immune system attacks your red blood cells. Sideroblastic anemia: In sideroblastic anemia, you don't have enough red blood cells and you have too much iron in your system.

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Macrocytic anemia: This anemia happens when your bone marrow makes unusually large red blood cells. Microcytic anemia: This anemia happens when your red blood cells don't have enough hemoglobin so they're smaller than usual. Normocytic anemia: In this type of anemia, you have fewer red blood cells than usual, and those red blood cells don't have the normal amount of hemoglobin.

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