

# UNDERSTANDING Anemia

# A



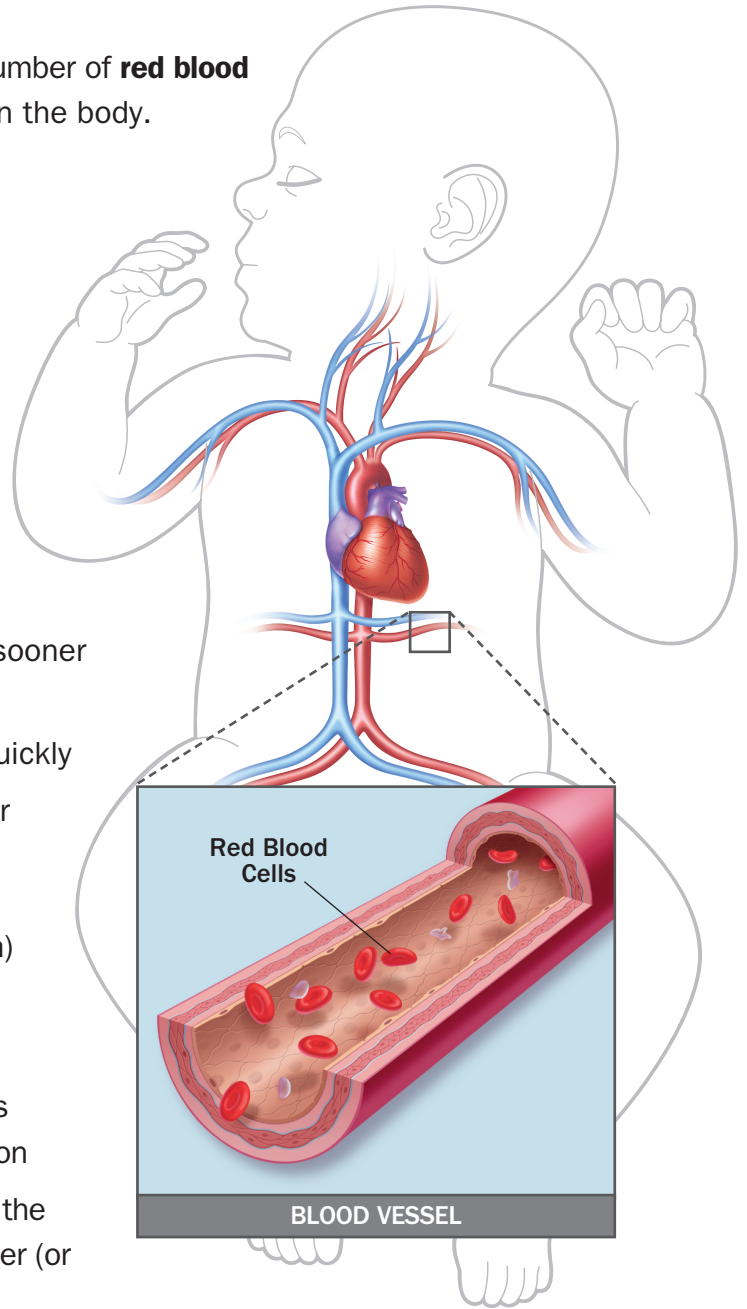
## What is anemia?

Babies with anemia have a lower than normal number of **red blood cells**. Red blood cells carry oxygen to tissues in the body.

## What causes anemia?

There are three main causes of anemia:

1. The baby's body does not produce enough red blood cells
  - Most babies have some anemia (called **physiologic anemia**) in the first few months after birth. This is because they are growing fast and it takes time for the red blood cell production to catch up
  - Premature babies often become anemic sooner than full-term babies
2. The body breaks down red blood cells too quickly
  - This problem is common when the mother and baby have different blood types (**Rh/ABO incompatibility**). These babies usually have **jaundice (hyperbilirubinemia)**
  - In a few babies, this problem can also be caused by infections or genetic disorders
3. Blood loss, most commonly due to blood tests needed to manage the baby's medical condition
  - Other causes include internal bleeding and the transfer of blood from the baby to the mother (or to another fetus) while still in the womb



Babies with anemia have a lower than normal number of red blood cells to carry oxygen to the cells in the body.

## What are the symptoms of anemia?

Many babies with anemia don't have any symptoms.

When symptoms occur, they can include:

- Pale skin
- Sluggishness (low energy)
- Poor feeding or getting tired while feeding
- Fast heart rate and rapid breathing when resting

# Understanding Anemia (continued)

## How is anemia diagnosed?

Anemia is diagnosed with a blood test.

### Common tests include:

- Hemoglobin – the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen
- Hematocrit – percentage of blood that is made up of red blood cells
- Reticulocyte count – percentage of immature red blood cells in the blood. It is a measure of how many new cells are being produced

## What treatment will my baby receive?

Many babies with anemia do not need treatment.

**For very premature babies or babies who have lost a lot of blood, treatment may include:**

- Blood transfusion (to increase the number of red blood cells in the body)
- Medicines to help the body make more red blood cells

## What will happen next?

Many causes of anemia go away on their own over time. But every baby is different.

Talk to the health care team. They can answer any questions you have about your baby.

## Glossary

**Hyperbilirubinemia** – buildup of a chemical called bilirubin in the body

**Jaundice** – yellow color of the skin and whites of the eyes

**Physiologic anemia** – low red blood cell count caused by the normal delay in making red blood cells after birth

**Red blood cells** – a type of cell that carries oxygen in the blood

**Rh/ABO incompatibility** – difference in blood type between the mother and the baby. This condition can increase the risk of anemia and jaundice

***Ask the health care team when you have questions—they are there to help.***

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## NOTES:

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