**DR. SINGH’S SURGERY**

65 Clifford Road, Hounslow West, Middlesex. TW4 7LR

Tel: 0208 577 5304 Practice email: cliffordroadsurgery@nhs.net

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**Dr Raj K. Singh** **Dr. Rashmi K. Singh**

MBBS DGM(Lon) BSc(Hons) MBBS(Lon) DFFP DRCOG MRCGP

# Causes, symptoms and treatment for Vitamin b12/folate DEFICIENCY

**What can cause a vitamin B12 or folate deficiency?**

There are a number of problems that can lead to a vitamin B12 or folate deficiency, including:

* pernicious anaemia – where your immune system attacks healthy cells in your stomach, preventing your body from absorbing vitamin B12 from the food you eat; this is the most common cause of vitamin B12 deficiency in the UK.
* a lack of these vitamins in your diet – this is uncommon, but can occur if you have a vegan diet, follow a fad diet or have a generally poor diet for a long time
* medication – certain medications, including anticonvulsants and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), can affect how much of these vitamins your body absorbs

Both vitamin B12 deficiency and folate deficiency are more common in older people, affecting around 1 in 10 people aged 75 or over, and 1 in 20 people aged 65 to 74.

**Signs and symptoms:**

Vitamin B12 and folate perform several important functions in the body, including keeping the nervous system healthy.

A deficiency in either of these vitamins can cause a wide range of problems, including:

* extreme tiredness
* a lack of energy
* [pins and needles (paraesthesia)](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pins-and-needles/pages/introduction.aspx)
* a sore and red tongue
* muscle weakness
* [depression](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/depression/pages/introduction.aspx)
* problems with memory, understanding and judgement

Some of these problems can also occur if you have a deficiency in vitamin B12 or folate, but do not have anaemia.

**How vitamin B12 or folate deficiency anaemia is treated:**

Most cases of vitamin B12 and folate deficiency can be easily treated with **injections** or **tablets** to replace the vitamin you are deficient in.

Vitamin B12 supplements are usually given by injection at first. Then, depending on whether your B12 deficiency is related to your diet, you will either require B12 tablets between meals or regular injections.

Folic acid tablets are used to restore folate levels. These usually need to be taken for four months.

In some cases, improving your diet can help treat the condition and prevent it recurring. Vitamin B12 is found in **meat, fish, eggs, dairy products, yeast extract** (such as Marmite) and **specially fortified foods, such as cereals**. The best sources of folate include **green vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts and peas.**

# Causes, symptoms and treatment for iron DEFICIENCY

Iron deficiency anaemia is a condition where a lack of iron in the body leads to a reduction in the number of red blood cells. Iron is used to produce red blood cells, which help store and carry oxygen in the blood. If you have fewer red blood cells than is normal, your organs and tissues won't get as much oxygen as they usually would.

**Symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia:**

Many people with iron deficiency anaemia only have a few symptoms. The severity of the symptoms largely depends on how quickly anaemia develops.

You may notice symptoms immediately, or they may develop gradually if your anaemia is caused by a long-term problem, such as a stomach ulcer.

**The most common symptoms include:**

* tiredness and lack of energy (lethargy)
* shortness of breath
* noticeable heartbeats (heart palpitations)
* a pale complexion

**Less common symptoms include:**

* headache
* feeling itchy
* a sore or abnormally smooth tongue
* hair loss
* a desire to eat non-food items, such as ice, paper or clay (pica)
* difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
* painful open sores (ulcers) on the corners of your mouth

**What causes iron deficiency anaemia?**

There are many things that can lead to a lack of iron in the body. In men and post-menopausal women, the most common cause is bleeding in the stomach and intestines.

This can be caused by a stomach ulcer, stomach cancer, bowel cancer, or by taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

In women of reproductive age, heavy periods and pregnancy are the most common causes of iron deficiency anaemia as your body needs extra iron for your baby during pregnancy.

Unless you're pregnant, it's rare for iron deficiency anaemia to be caused just by a lack of iron in your diet. However, if you do lack dietary iron, it may mean you're more likely to develop anaemia than if you have one of the problems mentioned above.

**How iron deficiency anaemia is treated:**

Treatment for iron deficiency anaemia involves taking iron supplements to boost the low levels of iron in your body. This is usually effective, and the condition rarely causes long-term problems. You'll need to be monitored every few months to check the treatment is working and your iron levels have returned to normal. The underlying cause will need to be treated so you don't get anaemia again. Increasing the amount of iron in your diet may also be recommended.

**Good sources of iron include:**

* dark-green leafy vegetables, such as watercress and curly kale
* iron-fortified cereals or bread
* brown rice, pulses and beans
* nuts and seeds
* meat, fish, eggs and tofu
* dried fruit, such as dried apricots, prunes and raisin