

Screening for Iron Deficiency Anemia and Iron Supplementation in Pregnant Women to Improve Maternal Health and Birth Outcomes

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a **final recommendation statement** on *Screening for Iron Deficiency Anemia and Iron Supplementation in Pregnant Women to Improve Maternal Health and Birth Outcomes*.

This final recommendation statement applies to pregnant adolescents and women who do not have signs or symptoms of iron deficiency or iron deficiency anemia (IDA).

The Task Force reviewed research studies on the

potential benefits and harms of screening all pregnant women for IDA. It also looked at studies on the benefits and harms of all pregnant women taking an iron supplement. The final recommendation statement summarizes what the Task Force learned: Based on available evidence, there is not enough information on the benefits and harms of routine IDA screening in pregnant women to recommend for or against screening. There also is not enough information on the benefits and harms of iron supplements to make a recommendation.

What is iron deficiency anemia?

Iron deficiency anemia is a condition in which the body does not have enough iron to build healthy red blood cells. Red blood cells are needed to carry oxygen throughout the body.

Facts about Iron Deficiency Anemia

Iron plays an important role in keeping a person healthy. Red blood cells need iron to be able to carry oxygen throughout the body. Most people get enough iron from a healthy diet.

At certain times—such as during pregnancy—the body needs more iron than usual. Often, the body can get the extra iron it needs by increasing the amount of iron absorbed from food or a woman can eat more iron-rich foods.

IDA happens when the body does not have enough iron and the blood cannot carry oxygen throughout the body as efficiently.

Often, someone with IDA will not have signs or symptoms. When present, the most common symptom is fatigue; others include shortness of breath, dizziness, headaches, and chest pain.

Several factors can increase the chances of developing IDA. These include eating a diet that doesn't have enough iron-rich foods and having a stomach or intestinal disease or taking a medicine that interferes with the body's ability to take in iron from food. Having only a short time between pregnancies also can increase the risk of IDA because the woman's body doesn't have enough time to rebuild her iron stores.

Screening for Iron Deficiency Anemia and Iron Supplementation in Pregnant Women

The goal of screening pregnant women is to detect IDA so it can be treated. Screening is generally done with a blood test. If IDA is found, it is often recommended that a woman increase her iron intake by eating more iron-rich foods or by taking an iron pill. The goal of iron supplementation is to raise the levels of iron in the blood by prescribing iron pills to prevent iron deficiency anemia.

Potential Benefits and Harms

The Task Force reviewed evidence on how IDA screening in pregnant women and taking iron supplements affects the health of pregnant women and their babies. They found no studies that looked at the benefits of routinely screening pregnant women on their long-term health or birth outcomes (such as cesarean delivery, preterm delivery, infant death, or low birth weight). They found that there was not enough evidence on whether or not supplementation improves a pregnant woman's health or her baby's birth outcomes. They found no studies that looked at the harms of routine IDA screening. Available studies on routine iron supplementation showed that it likely has few or mild harms.

The Final Recommendations on Iron Deficiency Anemia Screening and Iron Supplementation in Pregnant Women: What Do They Mean?

Here are the Task Force's final recommendations on routine screening for IDA and routine iron supplementation in pregnant women. Recommendation statements have letter grades. The grades are based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening for this purpose. Task Force recommendation grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When there is not enough evidence to judge benefits and harms, the Task Force does not make a recommendation for or against—it issues an **I Statement**. The Notes explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the full [final recommendation statement](#). The statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence document](#) provides more detail about the studies the Task Force reviewed.

1 The Task Force concludes that the *current evidence is insufficient* to assess the balance of benefits and harms of *screening for iron deficiency anemia* in pregnant women to prevent *adverse maternal health and birth outcomes*. | **Statement**

2 The USPSTF concludes that the *current evidence is insufficient* to assess the balance of benefits and harms of *routine iron supplementation* for pregnant women to prevent adverse maternal health and birth outcomes. | **Statement**

Notes

1 *current evidence is insufficient*
The Task Force did not find enough information to make a recommendation for or against IDA screening.
screening for iron deficiency anemia
Ordering a blood test to determine if a person is likely to have IDA.
adverse maternal health and birth outcomes
Negative events, such as premature birth, low birth weight, death of the baby soon after birth, or maternal bleeding after birth.

2 *current evidence is insufficient*
The Task Force did not find enough information to make a recommendation for or against taking iron pills.
routine iron supplementation
Taking iron pills on a regular basis

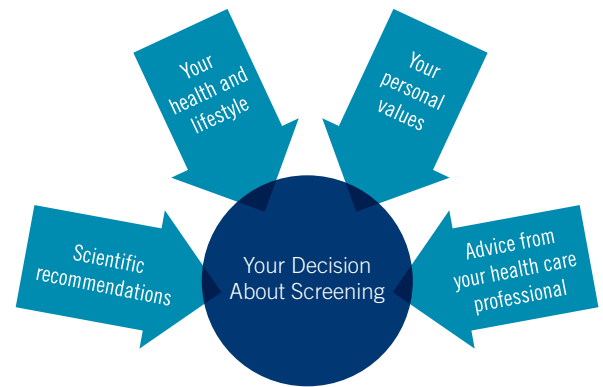
Should You Be Screened for Iron Deficiency Anemia or Take Iron Supplements?

Getting the best health care means making smart decisions about what screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines to get and when to get them. Many people don't get the tests or counseling they need. Others get tests or counseling they don't need or that may be harmful to them.

Task Force recommendations can help you learn about screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines. These services can keep you healthy and prevent disease. The Task Force recommendations do not cover diagnosis (tests to find out why you are sick) or treatment of disease. Task Force recommendations also apply to some groups but not others. For example, this recommendation applies only to pregnant adolescents and women.

Deciding Whether to Get Screened for Iron Deficiency Anemia or to Take Iron Supplements

Eating a healthy diet with good sources of iron can help prevent iron deficiency. If you are concerned about your diet or that you may be at risk for IDA, talk with your doctor or nurse about your concerns. Consider your own health and lifestyle. Think about your personal beliefs and preferences for health care. And consider scientific recommendations, like this one from the Task Force.



What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More About Iron Deficiency Anemia

- Your Guide to Anemia**
(National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
- Iron-Deficiency Anemia**
(National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health)
- Anemia**
(MedlinePlus)