

Low Iron?

In recent years we have seen an increase among some of our runners with low iron. I have consulted some medical professionals for advice. The reason that I am addressing this at this time is because we've just begun to train. For those involved in training and competing not only this summer but well into the fall during the competitive season, now is the time to address this. If low iron becomes an issue into the season and beyond, it could take several months to build iron levels back up. That would, and has in the past, been too late for some of our runners to complete a successful season.

Here is some information that I gathered: development of iron deficiency anemia is a gradual process. If the body is not taking in enough iron, the body first uses the iron that is stored in tissues (i.e., ferritin) and blood levels of ferritin will begin to decrease. If not corrected, the stored iron begins to be depleted as it is used in the production of red blood cells. In the early stages of iron-deficiency, blood levels of iron can be normal while stored iron, and therefore ferritin levels, will begin to decrease. So ferritin tells us more about how much stored iron we have available for use. With a low iron level, one would be on an oral iron supplement and yes it can take several months on the regimen for the iron levels to build back up.

People who typically need iron supplements are those with documented iron deficiency. Young women who become anemic due to poor dietary habits and have chronic and/or excessive loss of blood during their menstrual cycle may require iron supplements. However, people should not take iron supplements before talking to their doctor, as excess iron can cause chronic iron overload. An overdose of iron pills can be toxic, especially to children. For those who have concerns, it would be best for the person to see their medical doctor and discuss as then the MD can order an appropriate testing if indicated and if results are abnormal provide recommendations on diet and iron supplementations if warranted.

Those concerned should get a fingerstick hemoglobin test, usually done by the nurses or medical assistant in the doctors' office. If it is normal, no further testing is needed. If it is low, then the doctor usually orders cbc, iron, ferritin, and tbc (total iron binding capacity) blood tests to determine if the patient has anemia from low iron or some other reason.

In conclusion, this is information that we think you can use and should be aware of. This might be something to consider at the next scheduled physical. Minimally, this is a subject that should be discussed. If low iron levels aren't discovered until well into the season, it may be too late to build back up before the end of the season, which, for many, is the most important part.

If you have any questions or concerns, please consult your physician.