pediatric associates
of austin, p.a.

Iron Deficiency in Infants

Why Iron Matters for Your Baby

Iron is a critical nutrient your baby needs for rapid growth and **brain development**. It helps the body produce hemoglobin, which moves oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. When an infant doesn't get enough iron, it can lead to **iron deficiency**, and if left untreated, it progresses to **iron deficiency anemia (IDA)**, causing low energy and neurodevelopmental delays. Full-term, healthy babies are born with natural iron stores that last for about **the first 4 months of life**. After 4 months, those natural stores begin to deplete, and your baby relies on outside sources.

Prevention and Nutritional Guidelines

- **For Exclusively Breastfed Infants:** Because breast milk contains very little iron, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) **recommends that full-term, breastfed babies start a liquid iron supplement (1 mg/kg daily) at 4 months of age**. These can be found over the counter as a standard dose. It can be normal to have constipation as a side effect. This should continue until your baby is eating at least two daily servings of iron-fortified solid foods (like infant cereal or pureed meats).
- **For Formula-Fed Infants:** Standard infant formulas are already fortified with iron. If your baby drinks formula, they do not need additional iron drops during their first year.
- **Avoid Cow's Milk Under 12 Months:** Never give your baby regular cow's milk (or plant-based alternatives) before their first birthday. Cow's milk can cause microscopic intestinal bleeding and blocks your baby's ability to absorb iron.
- **Limit Milk After Age 1:** Once your toddler is over a year old, limit their total milk intake to **less than 24 ounces per day** so they stay hungry enough to eat iron-rich solid foods.

How We Screen and Diagnose

We routinely screen with a Complete Blood Count (CBC) via a fingerstick blood sample at well check visits between 9-12 months and again at 2 years. Based on results, additional blood testing via a venipuncture may be indicated.

Recommended Supplements

If iron deficiency anemia is found, we will review the best sources of iron. Based on the blood results and child's age, treatment could include dietary changes, supplements, or both. When a supplement is needed, we recommend choosing brands that are **third-party verified** (tested by independent labs like USP, NSF, or ConsumerLab) to guarantee ingredient purity and correct dosing.
When supplementation is suggested, our clinic's primary recommendation for infants is **NovaFerrum Pediatric Drops.**



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NovaFerrum Pediatric Drops are a third-party verified, liquid iron supplement formulated specifically to be free of sugar, alcohol, dye, and gluten, featuring a pleasant taste that infants accept easily. Your provider will review the recommended dose and when follow up testing is recommended. Typically, it is purchased online though sources such as Amazon or Target.

Tips for optimal iron supplement absorption

- Avoid taking the iron supplement with calcium-rich foods.
- Avoid calcium 1 hour before and 2 hours after taking the supplement.
- For optimal absorption, try to include Vitamin C when taking the supplement. Good sources of vitamin C include strawberries, oranges, mandarins, kiwi, broccoli, red bell peppers, papaya, and mango.

Safety Note: **Always keep iron supplements completely out of reach of children.** Accidental iron overdose is a leading cause of accidental poisoning in young kids.

Looking for more trusted health information? Explore our comprehensive library of provider-written guides on the PAA's Patient Handouts page. You will find practical, expert advice on related topics— including Starting Solids, and more.

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