How To Identify Anemia

Aging is accompanied by a number of physical changes. Some of these changes, such as vision impairment or loss of hearing, are anticipated, while others may arrive unexpectedly.

One condition many adults unexpectedly encounter is anemia. While anemia is common in older adults and its prevalence increases with age, it is not a condition that is widely considered part of the aging process. Anemia is often a symptom of a hidden problem that needs to be addressed promptly.

Anemia is one of the most common blood disorders, affecting more than three million Americans, says the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. The American Society of Hematology notes that anemia is characterized by insufficient levels of red blood cells in the blood. Anemia also occurs when red blood cells, which are responsible for carrying oxygen to the various organs and tissues throughout the body, are not functioning properly.

Very often the signs of anemia are overlooked or go unnoticed until a blood test determines low hemoglobin (Hb) or hematocrit (HCT) concentrations. Some people discover they have anemia as they attempt to donate blood, at which time their red blood cell count is found to be inadequate. When the body lacks oxygen, any number of the following symptoms may be experienced: weakness • dizziness • extreme fatigue • shortness of breath • fast or irregular heartbeat • pale or yellow skin • cold hands or feet

Frequently, existing disorders or conditions, such as congestive heart failure, are made worse by anemia. But unless doctors specifically consider anemia as a possible cause of symptoms, its presence can go undiagnosed. The American Academy of Family Physicians says the most common causes of anemia among older men and women include chronic diseases and iron deficiency. Vitamin B12 deficiency, folate deficiency, gastrointestinal bleeding, and myelodysplastic syndrome are other causes of anemia.

The main way to treat anemia is to discover its source and reverse the outcomes. For instance, a gastrointestinal bleed may need to be repaired. If iron deficiency is the source of the anemia, iron supplements may be prescribed. Many methods to correct anemia involve trial and error and experimentation, especially when the source of the anemia is unknown.

Anemia is a condition that can affect aging adults but does not need to be accepted as a natural consequence of aging. Correct diagnosis and treatment can mitigate symptoms.