

Iron Deficiency / God is Love

Tammy: Have you ever felt very tired all the time? Like your head aches, your eyes ache, even your bones ache!

Carol: It seems like every time women get together, someone says, 'I'm so tired!' I said it just this morning!

Hello; I'm Carol, and we're here again with Women of Hope. Maybe you can sit down with us and have a rest right now while we chat together and listen to some music.

I certainly get tired. Maybe it's just because I'm getting older, and I always have so much to do.

Tammy: Hi, I'm Tammy. Well we do get tired as we get older, but you're not old yet! And Carol, you do work very hard.

Carol: Sometimes I'm tired because I didn't sleep very well the night before. We all have days like that. There are a lot of reasons why we feel tired and have headaches. This is very common. Yet we women need our strength and our health so that we feel well and can enjoy our lives. Sometimes our families depend on us; and we need enough energy to do our jobs and all the other things we need to do.

Tammy: But what if you're so tired, day after day, that you don't even feel like eating much? Maybe there's a more serious problem. It's important to learn *why* we're so tired and see if we can correct the problem. One reason we might feel tired is if we don't have enough iron in our blood. Denise is here today to help us think about eating to be healthy. Denise has trained as a nutritionist and she's going to talk to us about eating well. Welcome, Denise.

Denise: Thanks Tammy. And hello to *you* too. Do *you* feel tired all the time? Let me ask some more questions. Do you feel colder than you should? ...Do you get headaches a lot? ...Do you seem to get sick often?

You might have felt this way for so long you forget what it feels like to be strong and full of energy! You have just gotten used to feeling this way. But maybe the problem is that you don't have enough iron in your blood.

Here's a simple test you can do. Pull down your lower eyelid and see if the color on the inside of your eyelid is bright pink or pale. It should be quite pink. Your gums should be pink, too, and not pale...and your fingernails. They should have a little pinkness to them, especially when you pinch them...then let go.

If you're having these problems...if you feel tired, or cold...if you get sick a lot; and if these tests show that your eyelids or fingernails are paler than they should be, you might need to see your doctor or health worker. They can do tests to find out what's going on. They need to check that you're not slowly bleeding inside, and check that you're absorbing your food properly. But in the meantime, maybe you need to think about what you eat. Maybe you're missing some necessary nutrients. We'll talk about these shortly. If you change what you eat you might feel better.

Carol: So Denise, you said before that we might not have enough *iron* in our blood. Can you explain what iron does?

Denise: Iron is an important mineral that we need to get from our food. Women and children need extra iron. Iron helps make up the part of our red blood cells that carries oxygen to all the cells of our body, and especially helps our muscles. If we don't have enough oxygen moving around our bodies, they won't work properly. We will get run down. It's oxygen that helps our cells to release energy so they work properly. When your body has too little iron, for a long time, you get a sickness called anemia.

All women need extra iron because our bodies lose blood each month. It's important that we women look after ourselves and our health. Women will often look after the needs of others so much that they ignore their own needs. I've heard people say if the mother isn't happy then no one else will be happy. But, I think it's also true that if the mother isn't healthy and strong then her family may suffer, because she won't be strong enough to take care of her family.

Tammy: I remember when I was pregnant that the doctor told me to take iron tablets.

Denise: Yes, if you're pregnant you need even more iron than at other times. It's important for you, the mother, and also for your baby...you want your baby to be as healthy as possible. As the pregnancy goes on, you'll need more and more iron. Ask your doctor or health re worker about giving you some iron tablets. They will know how much you need and when to take them. It's best to take them between your meals. You need enough iron to build up your own red blood cells...to keep *you* healthy...and to build up *your baby's* blood. You pass all the nutrients your baby needs through the placenta, and you need iron for a healthy placenta.

It's a tiring time for mothers when their babies are tiny. Often a new mother is low on iron by the time her baby is born and that makes her more tired. Then if she gets pregnant again quickly her body doesn't have time to build her own iron back up, and soon she needs extra iron *again*, for the next baby. It's better to wait a while before the next baby.

Carol: No wonder young mothers always seem tired! Now, what about children? They are small; do they need as much iron?

Denise: Actually, children are also at a high risk of anemia, or having low iron in their blood, because as they grow their bodies need to make a lot of extra blood. Cows' milk doesn't have any iron at all but a mother's breast milk does. So that's why, for the first couple of years of a child's life, their mother's milk is best for them. A very young child won't be eating much other food that contains iron, so they will depend on her milk to give them the iron that they need. Bottled milk formulas usually have iron added. But, these formulas can be very expensive. So if you can, breastfeed your baby and save that money for the foods with lots of iron. Once a child is eating solid food, be sure that they get food with iron every day.

Tammy: Denise, could you explain *what* we should eat to get enough iron in our food?

Denise: Sure. All red meats, poultry and fish have lots of iron, and the iron is in a form that your body can use easily. Liver is especially rich in iron. Eggs are good; nuts, seeds and peanut butter, are all good sources of iron as well. So are dried peas and beans, the kind that you usually soak, like black beans, kidney beans, navy beans or soybeans. Other foods with iron are leafy vegetables, apricots, raisins, and prunes.

Sometimes there is iron added to foods that we buy from the store, such as bread, cereal, rice and pasta.

Our body absorbs the iron from our food, but it can't use it all. Some things, like tea, coffee or milk can prevent our body from being able to use all the iron we eat. If you think you have a problem with 'low iron blood' and you drink a lot of milk, coffee or tea, it's best to avoid these at mealtimes, when you're eating foods with iron. Drink water at mealtime and have your milk, coffee or tea between meals.

Carol: So, it's better to drink only water with our meals?

Denise: Yes, or, you can have real fruit juice with your meal. That's a great combination. Juices have Vitamin C, which *increases* the amount of iron your body can use. Foods with a lot of vitamin C are an important part of your diet for many reasons.

Carol: I know oranges have vitamin C. What else...?

Denise: Just think of a fresh fruit salad! But some fruits are specially good: oranges, mangoes, guavas, papaya, kiwi fruit, strawberries, and melons. Also vegetables such as broccoli, green peppers, tomatoes and potatoes. When you eat these foods at the same time as you eat foods with iron, your body will be able to use more of the iron for building strong blood.

Some sources of iron are better than others. The type of iron found in meat is easier for your body to use than the iron from plants. We don't need a lot of meat, but even eating just a small amount of meat with beans, or green leafy vegetables will really increase the amount of iron your body gets from that meal.

Tammy: Thank you, this is really helpful information. So the things we eat or drink *together* can affect the way our bodies use the iron we take in. How about if I cook a pot of kidney beans with a little bit of minced meat, and some green peppers and spinach?

Denise: That would be great! It would give you a good amount of iron, and it would be even better if you ate an orange to finish.

I'd like to mention one more thing you can do to increase the iron in your food. This really surprised me when I heard it. Some heavy pots or pans are made of iron, and so if you cook with one of those there will be more iron in your food, especially if you cook the food slowly with liquid and some acidic food like tomatoes.

There are many causes of low iron blood or anemia that only your doctor or health worker can help you sort out, and if you have symptoms of anemia go to your health clinic. But often just eating the good food we've talked about can make a difference. I hope you have more energy soon!

Carol: Today we have Marli with us on Women of Hope. It's lovely to have you here again today, Marli. Welcome.

Marli: Thank you Carol. And hello, my dear friend. Today I'd like to talk about how much God loves us.

Carol: I love knowing that God knows me personally and that he cares about me and loves me.

Marli: The Almighty God is the creator of the universe, yet he loves each individual person on this planet. No matter what we've done, or how bad we are, his love never changes.

In God's word, the Bible, we read these words: *God is love.* (John 4:16b, NIV) Do you think of God that way?

You see, Christians worship the God who is made known to us in the Bible, and his character... his nature... his essence is *love!* Not revenge and hatred, but love!

Listen to what God says in the Bible:

“Can a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she had borne? Even she may forget, yet I will not forget you. I have written you on the palms of my hands.” (Isaiah 59:15-16)

God's love for us is even better than a mother's love for her baby. And we know how much mothers love their babies! God loves us even more than that.

Tammy: I like the way it says that God has written our names on the palms of his hands. When I was younger and I wanted to remember something, I would write it on my hand. This is a poetic way of saying that God never wants to forget us for a moment.

Marli: And he never does. He keeps us in his mind and heart all the time. And because he loves us, he will help us to deal with whatever is happening in our lives. God knows what you are facing in your life my friend. Perhaps you are facing something that is very difficult. Maybe you are afraid, or you have done something you are sorry about. Perhaps you are in feeling desperate about something.

God can help you to trust him whatever is happening in your life. He can help you to live a life where you win over your troubles. You can do that through the power of God's Son Jesus Christ, as he works in your life.

Carol: And Marli, that's true for everyone, isn't it?

Marli: Oh yes! You might be thinking, “Marli, you don't know me. You can't imagine what I've done in my life. There's no hope for me anymore!” But that's not true. There *is* hope for you my friend.

Tammy: Let's listen to a song now and after that Marli is going to tell us about some women prisoners in Brazil and how God changed them in a wonderful way.

Carol: You're with us on Women of Hope. Marli, why don't you tell us that story?

Marli: Let me tell you about some women that I used to visit in a prison in Brazil. I would go through a huge iron gate and the guard would take me through door after door, then lock them after me. I used to go to the women's section, and talk with the women prisoners about our God who is love. Many of the women were serving life sentences. Some were young, others were old. They loved to see my friends and me there every week. I used to talk, and sing, and pray with them.

But, as you know, prisons are not pleasant places. Wherever you look in a prison, you see the marks of evil, of crime, and of sin. The women in that prison had horrible stories to tell. They had committed awful acts because they were angry, bitter, full of hatred. Sin was written all over their faces. Not only were they prisoners behind walls and steel bars, but their hearts and souls were in prison as well.

Sin does this to people. It puts people in a spiritual prison; it's like there are iron bars of shame and guilt, fear and hatred.

I went there week after week to tell those women that they could be set free. Their bodies were behind prison walls, but their souls could be free from their sin.

Carol: Can you explain how this can happen – people being set free from their sins?

Marli: Well, the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth to pay the judgment we deserved for our wrong thoughts and acts – our sin. It's like he said he would serve our time for us. We deserved the death penalty, but he paid our penalty and has set us free. Jesus died on the cross in our place. You can be free!! ...There is no need for you to remain a prisoner of sin any more! (Romans 6: 17-18)

Many women in that prison believed this message. They decided to give their lives to God. They prayed and asked God to forgive their sins, and they received their *real* life back. Because of that, when they die, they will live forever with God in heaven.

God knows everything about you. He knows your past and your present. He even knows your future. However, he will never force you to follow him and accept Jesus's sacrifice for you. He lets you choose which way to go. If you are sorry for your sins and ask God to forgive you, you will be truly free!

Carol: That's true: it doesn't matter how tragic and horrible your life has been... how difficult your situation is right now... what bad things you have done. God loves you and he wants to forgive it all.

Marli: I visited those prisoners in Brazil for some time, and some of the women were totally transformed. What a joy! Their faces were changed! They started to smile. They learned to love their fellow prisoners. They even cleaned and decorated their cells. There was joy and victory, even in the darkest hours. They were new women and their old life-style had gone. A new life had begun.

Listen to these words from the Bible. Just let them sink into your heart. They are powerful and true. 'Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is gone, and everything is new.' (2 Corinthians 5:17, CEV)

My dear friend, would you pray with me and ask God to free you from your prison of sin and guilt? Remember, even if you are in a prison cell, you don't need to be a prisoner of sin anymore. Jesus paid the penalty for you and me!

Why not pray with me right now?

Dear God, I come to you now, with all my sins and guilt. I bring to you my anger...and my fears...and my despair. Please save me and set me free through your power. I ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Tammy: Thank you for that message of hope, Marli. If you prayed that prayer, or you would like to hear more about how God can give you a new start, why don't you write to us at this station.

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.