

What Is a Blood Disorder?

Blood keeps us alive by carrying oxygen and nutrients to every part of the body so our organs and tissues can work properly. It also takes away waste, fights infections, and moves hormones around. Blood is made up of red blood cells, which carry oxygen; white blood cells, which fight infections; and platelets, which help stop bleeding.

A blood disorder happens when one or more of these parts of the blood do not work the way that they should. The most common blood disorders in children and teens include anemia (when there are too few red blood cells or cells that don't work properly), bleeding disorders (such as hemophilia, when blood has trouble clotting), sickle cell disease (when red blood cells are shaped differently and don't carry oxygen well), and blood cancers (like leukemia).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How common are blood disorders?

About 9% of children aged two and older have anemia. Leukemia is rare, though it is the most common type of cancer in children. Bleeding problems are uncommon, but children and teens with certain health conditions are sometimes at risk of developing them and should follow medical guidelines designed to meet their needs.

For Parents and Caregivers: What should I do if I suspect my child may have a blood disorder?

Contact a medical provider. They will talk with you and your child, do an exam, and likely order a complete blood count (CBC) test. They may refer you to a blood specialist, called a hematologist.

For Youth: What should I do if I think I may have a blood disorder?

Talk to an adult you trust if you are having any issues. Do not ignore your symptoms. Getting help early is important.

What kind of help is there for blood disorders?

Treatment depends on the cause and type of disorder. Common treatments include:

- **Iron supplements/vitamins** can help treat anemia that is caused by low nutrients.
- **Special medications** can help blood clot more easily when there are bleeding issues.
- **Specialist care**, such as seeing a hematologist or genetic counselor, may be needed if the blood disorder is related to other problems or is inherited.

What other conditions are sometimes found with blood disorders?

Sometimes, people with blood disorders have other conditions like autoimmune issues or chronic kidney diseases. Be open with medical providers about your medical history and all symptoms.

Talking with a Medical Provider

When talking with medical providers or specialists, you might want to:

- **Bring notes!** Ahead of the appointment, take notes on anything you've noticed that worries you. Share any concerns that others have pointed out.
- **Ask questions like:**
 - "How do I prevent my child from becoming anemic?"
 - "What medicines will help my child stop bleeding?"
 - "How frequently should I see the specialist?"

What You Can Do at Home

While waiting for appointments or test results, it can help to:

- **Eat a balanced diet:** Serve foods rich in iron such as fortified grains and cereals, red meat, egg yolks, potatoes, and green leafy vegetables. Limit milk and dairy intake to no more than 24 ounces a day. Eat foods with vitamin C, like citrus fruits, which help the body absorb iron.
- **Stay active:** Exercising with family and friends benefits everybody!
- **Find joy:** To help manage stress, focus on doing favorite activities and finding new favorites.

Learning about bleeding disorders and getting help is a journey. You're not alone.

Search NYS



<https://bit.ly/searchnys>

NYS Department of Health County Programs – CYSHCN



<https://on.ny.gov/43ho1ZK>

ACT for Youth: Blood Disorders



<https://bit.ly/act-blood>

About This Series

This series of handouts on health conditions was written by clinicians in Weill Cornell Medicine's Pediatric Mental Health Integration Program, partners in the ACT for Youth CYSHCN Program Center of Excellence at Cornell University.

