



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

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What is my hemoglobin and how does it affect the way I feel?

Q: What is my hemoglobin and how does it affect the way I feel?

A: Blood is made up of plasma fluid, red blood cells, white blood cells, and other cells. *Hemoglobin* is the pigment that makes your red blood cells red. The normal range of hemoglobin is 14 to 18 g/dL for healthy men, and 12 to 16 g/dL for healthy women. For people on dialysis, the target hemoglobin is 11 to 12 g/dL.

Anemia: If your hemoglobin is below 11 g/dL, you won't have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen through your body. This is called *anemia*.

Most people have anemia as their kidneys fail, because their kidneys make less of a hormone called *erythropoietin* (EPO), which tells the body to make red blood cells. Symptoms of anemia include:

- Fatigue
- Muscle weakness
- Feeling cold all the time
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Pale skin color
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Headache
- Changes in menstrual cycles (women)
- Trouble getting erections (men)
- Slower than usual growth (children)

Making sure that your anemia is treated and your hematocrit stays in the target range will help you to have more energy and feel your best.

What *I* can do to keep my hemoglobin in the target range for dialysis:

- Know my hemoglobin number and track it over time. Right now my hemoglobin is _____.
- Track my symptoms in a journal so I can tell my doctor how I feel.
- Know my EPO dose and make sure I am always getting the right amount. Right now, my dose is _____.
- If I am in the hospital, ask my doctor to be sure I get my EPO dose.
- Get *Just the Facts: Anemia* from Life Options at (800) 468-7777 or www.lifeoptions.org.
- Visit or read module 6 of Kidney School™: *Anemia and Kidney Disease* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about anemia.