Southern Indiana Nephrology and Hypertension

Anemia and Chronic Kidney Disease

Anemia is a common problem in which there are not enough healthy red blood cells to provide the body with the oxygen that it needs. Anemia can cause many symptoms, such as:

- Looking pale
- Feeling tired, weak
- Restless legs
- Feeling of coldness
- Lightheadedness
- Decreased exercise tolerance
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Heart enlargement
- Irregular heart beats
- Difficulty thinking
- Impaired immune system
- Decreased Libido
- Headaches
- Ringing in ears

The diagnosis of anemia is made by a simple blood test called a hemoglobin, which measures your red blood cells. If this is low, it means that you have anemia. Blood work, including kidney function tests, can sometimes show the cause. The stool should also be checked to be sure there is no blood loss from the colon or intestine. If blood loss is found, further testing, such as a colonoscopy, may be required.

There are many causes of anemia, including:

- Blood loss
- Kidney disease
- Inherited problems of the blood cells
- Iron deficiency
- B12 deficiency
- Folate deficiency

If kidney disease is causing the anemia, the kidneys will release less of the hormone called erythropoietin, which tells the body to make blood, and anemia can develop.

Treatment of anemia may include:

- Iron tablets
  - Over-the-counter iron sulfate 2 pills twice a day
  - Prescription iron pills such as
    - Niferex 1 pill twice a day
    - Ferrous fumarate 1 pill twice a day
- Intravenous (IV) iron
  - Venofer: given over 1 hour, once a week, for five weeks at the hospital
  - Feraheme: given in office, 2 doses at least 3 days apart
- B12 injections
- Folate pills
- Erythropoietin (hormone) replacement
  - Aranesp given as injection, weekly to monthly
  - Procrit given as injection, usually weekly

Anemia requires frequent monitoring, and often many different types of treatment, but can be successfully treated!