

Hemochromatosis Diet—Simple as ABC

For some getting the diagnosis of hemochromatosis can be alarming at first. Most patients and many doctors have never heard of hemochromatosis and as such their level of knowledge about the condition is limited.

In this brief article, our aim is to reduce the concerns associated with the unknown and to dispel some myths about the hemochromatosis diet.

Hereditary hemochromatosis—classic type I (HHC) is associated with mutations of the *HFE* gene. HHC can result in abnormally high levels of iron in the body (iron overload) from a slow build up of iron caused by these mutated copies of *HFE*. The iron build up takes place over decades and is rare in children.

Iron cannot be excreted and over time, the excess iron builds up in vital organs such as the liver, heart, pancreas, pituitary, bone marrow and the joints. People with high iron levels are at an increased risk for heart failure, diabetes mellitus, arthritis (osteoarthritis or osteoporosis), liver disease (cirrhosis, cancer), infections, depression, and hormone imbalances resulting in loss of sex drive, infertility, or impotence. When iron levels are too high or organ damage too severe, hemochromatosis can be fatal.

Iron reduction with blood dona-

tion or phlebotomy can restore iron to healthy levels. Controlling the amount of iron absorbed from the diet is one way to prevent or slow the build up of iron and thereby lower the risk of the consequences of iron overload.

The hemochromatosis diet need not be extreme; in fact if a HHC patient follows these simple steps they can greatly reduce the amount of iron absorbed from the diet. The ABC's include: to limit consumption of red meat and alcohol. Do not eat raw shellfish and avoid supplemental vitamin C at mealtime and if diabetic, give priority to the diabetes diet.

Before altering the diet too dramatically, it is important to know your baseline iron levels. This can be achieved with a Complete Iron Panel: hemoglobin, fasting serum iron, total iron binding capacity (TIBC) or UIBC and serum ferritin. It is best to obtain these levels fasting (nothing by mouth after midnight except water and prescription medications) but some doctors will test in two steps: non-fasting first followed by a second set of tests done fasting. It is a good idea to restrict the amount of red meat and multi-vitamins 72 hours prior to having the tests done.

Remember to get copies of these tests and journal them in some

way. Iron Disorders Institute's Personal Health Profile is one record keeping form that can help you. It is available online as a free download www.hemochromatosis.org

Once you have the results of your blood work and know your iron levels you might find the article "IRON ZONES helpful. This single topic article is available online www.hemochromatosis.org and provides some basics about iron levels and diet.

ABCs of the hemochromatosis diet: limit consumption of red meat and alcohol. Do not eat raw shellfish and avoid supplemental vitamin C at mealtime...and if diabetic, give priority to the diabetes diet.

Learn More: read Iron Zones, The Hemochromatosis Cookbook and get a copy of the DVD: Iron Men—Living with Hemochromatosis

