

What is aplastic anemia? — Aplastic anemia is a condition that happens when a person has too few blood cells. There are 3 different types of blood cells:

- Red blood cells – These cells carry oxygen to your body.
- White blood cells – These cells fight infections.
- Platelets – Platelets help clots form so that you stop bleeding after you cut or are injured.

Blood cells are made in the center of your bones, in a part called the bone marrow. Aplastic anemia happens when your body stops making enough of all 3 types of cells at the same time.

What causes aplastic anemia? — Aplastic anemia is caused by damage to your bone marrow. Some people are born with damaged bone marrow. In older children or adults, many things can damage bone marrow, including:

- Certain medicines
- Certain chemicals
- Infections from certain viruses
- Problems with your body's infection-fighting system (also called the "immune system")

But for many people, doctors don't know the cause of aplastic anemia.

What are the symptoms of aplastic anemia? — Some symptoms are the same as in other types of anemia. They include:

- Weakness
- Feeling very tired
- A fast heartbeat
- Trouble breathing
- Headache and muscle pains

People with aplastic anemia might also:

- Get infections often

- Have more bruising or bleeding than normal

Is there a test for aplastic anemia? — Yes. Tests include:

- Blood tests, including a "complete blood count" (also called a "CBC")
- Bone marrow biopsy – For this test, a doctor will take a very small sample of the bone marrow. Then another doctor will look at the cells under a microscope.

The blood and bone marrow will be tested for different causes of low blood cell counts, including aplastic anemia.

How is aplastic anemia treated? — The treatment depends on the cause of your aplastic anemia. Treatment can include:

- Stopping medicines that might have caused the problem
- Medicines – These can include:
  - Antibiotics and antiviral medicines – These are used to prevent and treat infections.
  - Transfusion of red blood cells or platelets – During a transfusion, you will get blood that has been donated by someone else. Doctors try to avoid giving 1 person a lot of transfusions. They also try to avoid using blood from family members who might donate bone marrow later.
  - "Immunosuppressive" medicines – Aplastic anemia is sometimes caused by an "overactive" immune system. This means your immune system attacks healthy cells in your bone marrow. If this is the case, you might get medicines that prevent your immune system from doing this. There are also other medicines that help your bone marrow make more blood cells.
- Bone marrow transplant (also called a "stem cell transplant") – This procedure replaces abnormal or missing cells in the bone marrow with healthy cells from a donor.