



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



Supported by:

World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office for India, Sustain Accelerate Mainstream Access to Reproductive-health Through Health-system (SAMARTH) team under the guidance of the Adolescent Health (AH) Division at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India.

WHAT

is anemia?

Human blood contains a red pigment called hemoglobin, which is rich in iron and carries oxygen to different parts of the body. A diet deficient in iron leads to decreased amounts of hemoglobin, further leading to hindered supply of oxygen to different parts of the body; this state is known as anemia. Healthy adolescents ideally should have hemoglobin of at least 12 grams/ 100 ml blood.

WHAT

are the signs and symptoms of anemia in adolescents?



Signs and symptoms of anemia are very vast, and usually include:

- Pale and dull-looking lower eyelids, tongue, skin, palms and nails: Healthy eyelids, tongue and nails should be pink in colour
- Feeling of tiredness, laziness all the time.
- Poor participation in physical activities or games
- Easy onset of breathlessness: Feeling out of breath even while undertaking simple physical exercises such as climbing stairs
- Difficulty/Inability to concentrate
- Dizziness
- Leg cramps



WHAT

can adolescents do to prevent anemia?

To prevent anemia, adolescents should consume a home-cooked, well-balanced diet containing all the nutrients covering various food groups such as:

- Energy-giving foods and carbohydrate-rich foods like whole grains, millets, potatoes, jaggery; and foods containing fats like oil and ghee
- Body-building foods (protein-rich) like pulses (legumes, lentils), peas, chana, soyabeans, nuts, milk and milk products, eggs, meat, etc.
- Protective foods containing minerals and vitamins like green leafy vegetables, and seasonal vegetables and fruits (including citrus fruits)
- Additionally, one must avoid too many sweets, junk and processed food like white bread, pasta, noodles, burgers, chocolates, soft drinks, etc. and reduce consumption of alcohol and tobacco



WHAT

are some food items which are rich in iron?

Some of the common Iron rich food are below:

- Non-vegetarian food like mutton, chicken, eggs, fish, etc.
- Dark green leafy vegetables like spinach and kale, and dried fruits like raisins, dates and apricots
- Other vegetables like broccoli, potatoes, beetroot, beans, and cabbage
- Fortified cereals and legumes like wheat, rajma, chickpea, rice, barley, seeds, etc.
- Fruits like guavas, apples, bananas, pomegranate, etc.



WHAT

can one eat to increase absorption of iron?

You can enhance the absorption of iron from meals by eating foods high in vitamin C and avoiding tea/coffee/milk after the meal. Stay away from tobacco products. Avoid taking calcium supplements along with IFA tablets.






WHAT

are the common types of anemia?

Anemia can be of various types depending on the deficiency in the body (may be nutritional like iron deficiency anemia/non-nutritional). Iron deficiency anemia is most common in adolescents, affecting more than 40% of adolescents in India (especially adolescent girls).

Iron deficiency anemia can further be classified as mild/moderate/severe depending on the severity of the anemia, as given:

Patient Demographic	Mild anemia	Moderate anemia	Severe anemia
 Adult man	11–12.9 g/dL	8–10.9 g/dL	<8 g/dL
 Adult woman (Non-pregnant)	11–11.9 g/dL	8–10.9 g/dL	<8 g/dL
 Adult woman (Pregnant)	10–10.9 g/dL	7–9.9 g/dL	<7 g/dL

WHAT

is the WIFS programme?

Weekly Iron and Folic Acid supplementation (WIFS) is a Government of India programme under which iron folic acid tablets are given free-of-cost to all school-going adolescent boys and girls studying in government/government-aided schools/municipal schools from classes 6th to 12th, and to out-of-school adolescent girls through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) once every week. In addition to IFA supplements, albendazole tablets for de-worming are also administered twice a year.

WHY

do adolescents need WIFS?

Adolescence is a period of tremendous physical, sexual, and mental growth. Therefore, the nutritional needs of adolescents are greater during this time to support this rapid growth. Iron and folic acid are important nutrients that support the development of body mass, help in expanding blood volume, support the growth of new cells, and help in replenishing blood loss during menstruation (in girls). Further, if an

adolescent girl is pregnant, folic acid helps prevent birth defects in the unborn child.

Reports show that many adolescent girls and boys in our country are anemic, which increases the need for WIFS.



IS

WIFS used to treat anemia in adolescents?

No. WIFS is NOT used as a treatment for anemia in adolescents, but is an intervention to prevent anemia. However, WIFS may help in cases of mild/moderate anemia if the adolescent takes a well-balanced diet along with WIFS. For proper treatment of anemia (mild/moderate/severe), the adolescent must contact the nearest health facility or an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)/Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) at the earliest.



IS

the screening of adolescents for anemia mandatory before starting WIFS?

No. Since WIFS is used to only prevent anemia in adolescents, screening for anemia is not required. WIFS must be taken by all adolescents irrespective of their nutritional status. If an adolescent is suffering from anemia, s/he/they must contact the nearest health facility or an ANM/ASHA for proper treatment.

WHAT

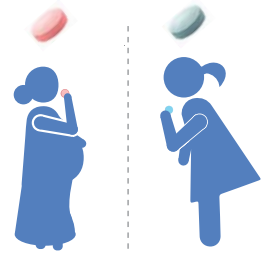
is the dose of iron and folic acid in the supplements given on a weekly basis to the adolescents?

WIFS comprises of 60 mg elemental iron and 500 mcg folic acid in a single tablet administered on a fixed day in a week, for 52 weeks a year.

WHAT

does the weekly IFA tablet for adolescents look like? Is it different from the IFA given to pregnant women?

The IFA tablet for adolescents under the WIFS programme is a **blue-coloured tablet**. On the other hand, the IFA tablet given to pregnant women is a **red-coloured tablet**, and can hence be differentiated easily.



IS

WIFS only available for adolescent girls?

No. WIFS is available for **both adolescent boys (school-going) and girls (school-going and out-of-school)** under the Government of India WIFS programme.



Students of

WHICH

standard/class are given WIFS? Is it available at all schools?

Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation is provided to all boys and girls from classes **6th to 12th** from all government, government-aided and municipal schools.

WHERE

can out-of-school girls get WIFS?

Non school-going adolescent girls receive WIFS at their nearest AWC.



HOW

should an adolescent take the iron and folic acid tablets?

The adolescents should keep in mind the following while taking WIFS:

- Take IFA tablet on the designated day every week under the supervision of the teacher/Anganwadi worker
- Do not consume IFA tablet on an empty stomach (IFA may be swallowed at least one hour after the meal with clean drinking water)
- Do not swallow the IFA tablet with milk. Also, avoid taking tea/coffee/milk before and after one hour of the meal and after taking the IFA tablet, as it reduces the absorption of iron in the body

IS

IFA supplementation also available for pregnant adolescent girls?

Yes. However, the dose for pregnant adolescent girls is different (red-coloured IFA tablet containing 60 mg of elemental iron and 500 mcg of folic acid to be taken daily, starting from the 4th month of pregnancy).



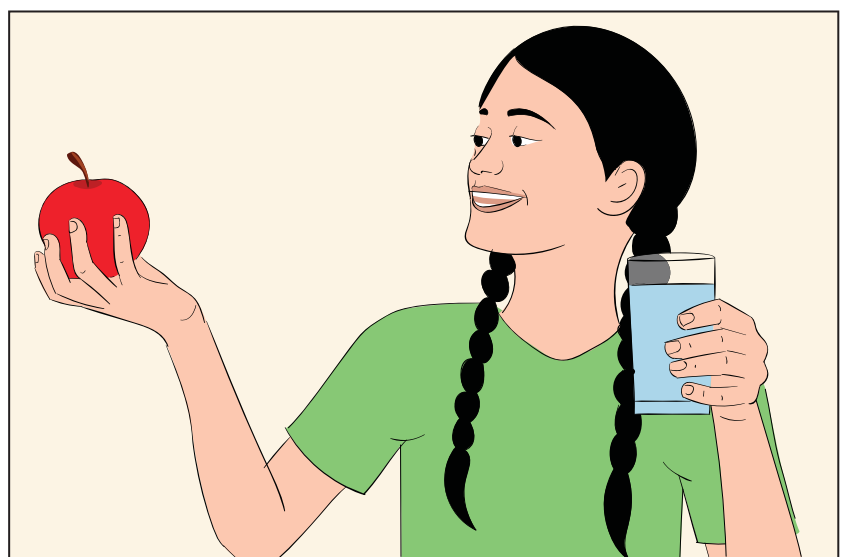
= 60 mg + **500 mg**
elemental iron folic acid



DOES

WIFS lead to weight gain?

WIFS does NOT lead to any weight gain. One must eat a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly in order to maintain an optimum and healthy weight.



DO

iron and folic acid tablets have any side-effects on the adolescents consuming them?

IFA tablets are safe to use and do not cause significant side-effects in adolescents consuming them. Some adolescents may face mild discomfort in the beginning of IFA tablet usage like darkening of stools, constipation, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, etc., which usually subside within a few weeks of continuing IFA supplementation. However, if this discomfort doesn't subside within few weeks, the adolescent must visit the nearest health facility or contact the nearest ANM/ASHA.

For

HOW

long should an adolescent consume IFA supplementation? Is it safe to consume WIFS over long time periods?

Yes, it is safe to consume WIFS over long and/or multiple time periods. There is no time limit for the consumption of WIFS. It is essential for adolescents to take WIFS for the prevention of anemia and for support in their physical and mental growth.

DOES

WIFS help in regulating menstruation in adolescent girls with irregular menstrual cycles?

Irregular menstrual cycles may be a result of multiple reasons like hormonal irregularities, malnutrition, infections, etc. which are not treated by WIFS. WIFS is used to only prevent anemia in adolescents. Hence, if an adolescent girl is facing menstrual irregularities, she should visit the nearest health facility or contact the nearest ANM/ASHA.

WHAT

is albendazole?



The albendazole tablet is used to control worm infestation in the intestines.

WHAT

is the relationship between nutrition and worm infestation?

Once worms enter the body, they survive on the food we eat. They take away the nutrients from the food and deprive the host body of essential nutrients, causing undernutrition and anemia.

WHAT

are the reasons for worm infestation in adolescents?

Worm infestation (entry of worms in the human body) may occur due to following reasons:

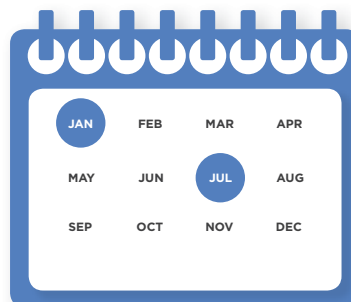
- Poor personal hygiene and sanitation
- Walking barefoot on unclean floors
- Using unclean hands to eat/drink
- Consuming unhygienic water and food



HOW

frequently should one take albendazole tablets?

Albendazole tablet (400 mg) should be taken every six months to prevent and treat worm infestation in the body.



IS

screening by a doctor required before starting albendazole tablets?

Albendazole tablets are safe to use and recommended by doctors for the prevention and treatment of worm infestation. No prior screening is required before starting this medicine.

HOW

can an adolescent prevent the entry of worms in the body?



To prevent worm infestation, one should maintain proper personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. The following steps may be useful:

- Always use latrines and avoid open air defecation
- Wear footwear all times and do not walk barefoot, especially when outside the home
- Regular consumption of albendazole 400 mg tablet, six months apart, for control of worm infestation
- Use of clean drinking water can help protect from various infections and diseases
- To prevent germs from entering into our abdomen, it is essential to wash hands with soap and water before cooking and consuming food, after defecation, and after discarding the fecal matter of a child
- Prepare and consume hygienically cooked food



WHAT

is meant by maintaining personal hygiene?



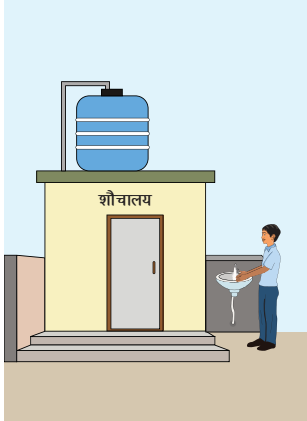
Personal hygiene means maintaining cleanliness of the body and the surroundings. The following practices may help adolescents in maintaining personal hygiene:

- Take bath every day using clean water and soap
- Always wear clean clothes
- Brush your teeth twice every day
- Wash your hands with soap and clean water after using the toilet and before cooking or eating
- Keep nails clean and cut them short
- Prevent head lice by washing hair regularly
- Always wear footwear, especially while going to the toilet and when stepping out of the house



WHAT

is meant by
**environmental
cleanliness
for infection
prevention?**



Environmental cleanliness means keeping the surroundings clean to prevent the breeding of infection-causing organisms. The following practices may help adolescents in maintaining environmental cleanliness:

- Keep food and drinking water covered
- Never throw garbage, including menstrual waste, in the open. Use a closed bin for waste disposal
- Always use toilets. Do not defecate in the open
- Do not let water accumulate in pots, tyres, pits, etc. Such stagnated water becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes
- Motivate others also to keep their houses and surroundings clean

