

# Iron Deficiency in Female Athletes

*Anemia has been identified as the most common medical condition among athletes. It is more common in females than males and especially in female athletes.*

Coaching as long as I have, I truly was not prepared or near knowledgeable enough about a condition very common in athletes called anemia.

My daughter Chloe, was getting slower by the day, although her training plan was stronger than ever. She began her season running in the low 6:00 range in the mile and began backsliding to 7:30 by the midway point. It was then that we started to put the symptoms together. Her hair was falling out, weight loss, amenorrhea, vomiting after anaerobic workouts and something even I didn't realize, she craved ice chips all the time - a very common symptom when the iron levels dip so low.

A collegiate athlete is recommended to maintain a serum ferritin level of 40-50. Chloe's number was 5, and she was in danger of requiring a transfusion at such a low level. Luckily, this can be corrected with specific iron supplements - not the most pleasant cure, but all the difference in the world. Within three weeks she brought her level to 39 and must continue this iron supplementation indefinitely. I only wish I had noticed her symptoms earlier.

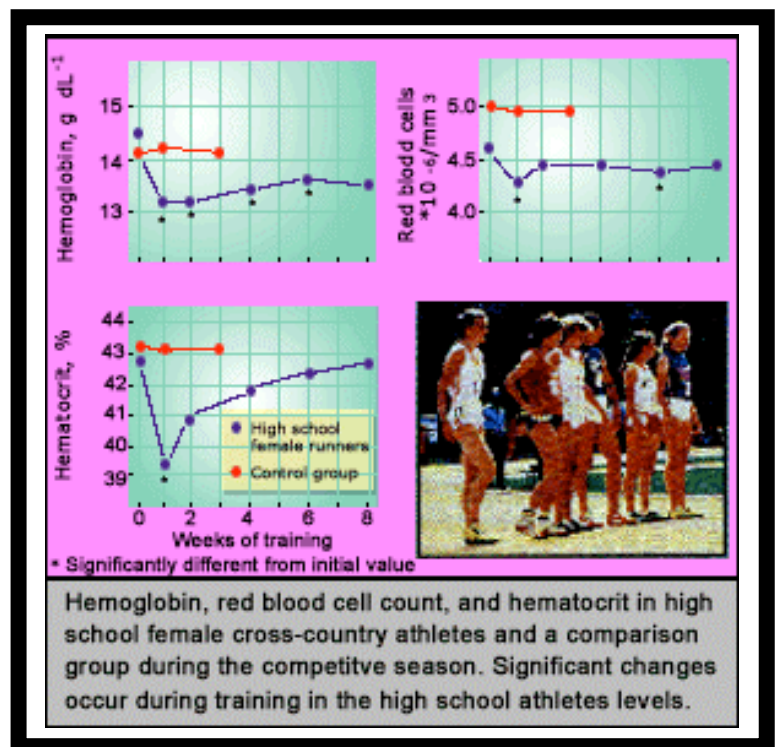
## The Facts

*Dawn Staab*

**Symptoms and signs:** In the first stages of iron deficiency, the athlete's performance begins to decline. The athlete may complain of burning thighs and nausea from becoming anaerobic. Ice craving is also common. Athletes with mild iron-deficiency anemia may have a slight drop off in maximum performance. **Determining serum ferritin levels is the most accurate test of one's iron levels. You must request this test from the Doctor, as it is not in their normal spectrum of iron tests.**

**Anemia and iron deficiency:** The capacity of the body to transport oxygen is one of the factors which limits physical performance. Oxygen is transported in the blood by the pigment of the red blood cells (hemoglobin). If the concentration of hemoglobin is reduced, the oxygen-transporting capacity of the body is impaired, and therefore the capacity to perform drops.

Anemia is said to occur when the concentration of hemoglobin falls below that specified as normal for the individual's age and sex. Athletes who subject themselves to prolonged, strenuous exertion (for example, by daily endurance training) may develop a degree of anemia.



**Iron supplementation must be prescribed and monitored by your physician, and should not be undertaken on your own.**