

What is haemochromatosis?

Haemochromatosis is an inherited disorder, which results in iron overload. It is one of the most common genetic disorders in Australia today.

Normally, our bodies absorb only the amount of iron from our food that we need for our daily needs. People with haemochromatosis absorb too much iron. This excess iron is stored in our body. Over time this leads to iron overload.

If undetected and untreated the excess iron can cause organ or tissue damage and can potentially result in premature death.

Haemochromatosis is one of the most easily treated disorders if detected early.

Who is at risk?

Haemochromatosis is one of the most common genetic disorders. About 1 in 200 Australians of northern European ancestry have the genetic risk for haemochromatosis.

What about my family?

Haemochromatosis is an inherited recessive gene disorder. It is passed down through the mother and father.

Brothers, sisters, parents and children of anyone diagnosed with haemochromatosis are at risk – they should be tested. Children are usually not tested until 18 years of age unless they display unusual symptoms.

You should tell your family if you are diagnosed and encourage them to get tested.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common symptoms noticed by people with iron overload are:

- Chronic fatigue
- Joint pain leading to osteoarthritis

Advanced signs and symptoms:

- Bronze to slate grey skin colour
- Liver cirrhosis which can lead to liver cancer
- Diabetes
- Hormonal changes and loss of libido
- Heart problems

Symptoms, if present, take time to develop and may build up over time.

No two people are alike so symptoms will vary from person to person.

Not everybody will have the same symptoms.

Some people will have no symptoms at all.

Males most often demonstrate symptoms between the age of 40 and 60.

Females may not develop symptoms until later in life because of blood loss during child bearing years, however some women will develop iron overload at a younger age.

This leaflet is intended to provide general information about haemochromatosis. You should consult your doctor for medical advice.

Early diagnosis is vital to prevent organ damage and serious health problems

All of the symptoms of haemochromatosis can also be caused by other medical conditions. Iron accumulates slowly over many years and accumulates more quickly in some people than others.

Haemochromatosis is diagnosed by simple blood tests ordered by your GP.

Iron Studies. Transferrin Saturation and Serum Ferritin. These give an indication of iron overload. The normal range for Transferrin saturation is 10% to 50% and for Serum Ferritin is 20 - 300ug/l for males and 10 - 200ug/l for females.

Gene test. This will be done if the tests indicate iron overload or if a close relative has been diagnosed with haemochromatosis.

Treatment for haemochromatosis is simple and effective.

Treatment

Regular venesection, which is like a blood donation, removes excess iron from the body.

Haemochromatosis cannot be treated by diet alone.

Where can I find out more?

Join **Haemochromatosis Australia** and receive our free booklet and regular newsletters.

Visit our website
www.haemochromatosis.org.au
Call our **INFO LINE 1300 019 028**
Talk to your doctor.

Join Haemochromatosis Australia.

You can join Haemochromatosis Australia online at www.haemochromatosis.org.au/finaljoin.htm
OR

complete your details below and post to:
Haemochromatosis Australia
PO Box 154, COOPERS PLAINS QLD 4108

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Our vision.

No Australian will experience the symptoms of haemochromatosis.

About us Haemochromatosis Australia is the not for profit support, advocacy and health promotion group for Australians affected by haemochromatosis.

We provide support for people with the disorder and their families.

We promote awareness of the disorder and the need for early diagnosis in the community.

We encourage and foster research into haemochromatosis.

Join us Help us raise awareness of haemochromatosis and reduce the impact of this disorder. When you join we will send you our comprehensive information booklet. We will keep you up to date with our newsletter, website and our INFO LINE 1300 019 028.

You can join online at our website
www.haemochromatosis.org.au/finaljoin.htm
or use the application form in this brochure.

Contact us

www.haemochromatosis.org.au

INFO LINE 1300 019 028

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Haemochromatosis

Inherited iron overload disorder

Very common, yet
little known



Potentially fatal but
easily treated

