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# 2018 IRON DEFICIENCY DAY: A CALL TO DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF IRON DEFICIENCY

- **This year's Iron Deficiency Day (26 November 2018) aims to raise awareness of the serious public health problems posed by iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia and highlight the negative impact the condition can have on its sufferers.<sup>1</sup>**
- **Iron deficiency is present in one-third of the world's population.<sup>2</sup>**
- **It is most prevalent in premenopausal and pregnant women and children under five years of age.<sup>3</sup>**
- **This year, the Iron Deficiency Day Symptom Checker will use animated characters to bring the varied and numerous symptoms associated with iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia to life.**

THE 2018 IRON DEFICIENCY DAY IS A CALL FOR PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD TO GET IRON-INFORMED AND TO UNDERSTAND WHY IRON IS IMPORTANT FOR THE BODY AND WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF IRON LEVELS ARE NOT PROPERLY MANAGED. IRON DEFICIENCY REMAINS AN UNDER-RECOGNISED AND UNDERESTIMATED CONDITION DESPITE ITS POTENTIALLY SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES AND RELATIVELY HIGH PREVALENCE.<sup>6,7</sup>

Although iron deficiency can affect anyone, it is most prevalent in premenopausal women, pregnant woman and children under five years of age<sup>3</sup>. Iron deficiency, left untreated, can develop into iron deficiency anaemia. The effects of iron deficiency differ from person to person, but they can be linked to an overall decline in general health and well-being.<sup>13</sup> Even without anaemia, iron deficiency can be debilitating, exacerbate an underlying chronic disease and lead to increased morbidity and mortality.<sup>4</sup> If the condition develops, common symptoms include fatigue,<sup>5,9,10</sup> pale skin,<sup>5</sup> brittle nails,<sup>5,11</sup> craving non-food items such as dirt, clay and ice<sup>5,12</sup> and an inability to concentrate.<sup>9,13</sup> However, the symptoms of iron deficiency can manifest in different ways; they are hard to pinpoint and can be associated with a number of other health conditions.<sup>4,5</sup> In children specifically, iron deficiency can significantly impair cognitive and motor development.<sup>14</sup>

Not recognising the symptoms of iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia is often the biggest contributor to not seeking – and receiving – a diagnosis.<sup>4</sup> Learning to identify the symptoms is an important step towards finding the diagnosis. The new Iron Deficiency Day Symptom Checker will use animations to elucidate the effects of iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia in order to educate people in recognising the condition.

Dr. Diana Mansour, Consultant in Community Gynaecology and Reproductive Health Care and Head of Sexual Health Services at New Croft Centre in Newcastle, United Kingdom, said: "Iron deficiency affects so many women across the world and can have a significant impact on their health and quality of life. Maintaining iron levels is particularly important in pregnant women, as it can affect not only a woman's health, but also the development of her unborn child. It is vital that we encourage women to recognise the symptoms of iron deficiency so that they can talk to their healthcare providers and start to access the support they need to manage their iron levels effectively."

Prof Michal Matysiak, Department of Paediatrics, Haematology and Oncology, Medical University of Warsaw, Poland stresses the point that there's a real need to raise awareness of the serious consequences of iron deficiency. "Even though it can have a major impact on a child's development, iron deficiency remains underdiagnosed and undertreated. This disease is the number one nutritional deficiency globally. Greater awareness of iron deficiency and an understanding of its symptoms would help correct that problem."

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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**Iron Deficiency Day** takes place every year on 26 November and is dedicated to:

- raising awareness of the serious public health problem iron deficiency poses.<sup>1</sup>
- highlighting the significant impact iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia can have on the lives of those living with it.<sup>1</sup>
- helping people recognise the common and often overlooked symptoms.

To help people around the world get iron informed, Iron Deficiency Day 2018 has developed a range of information and materials to help people understand iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia and a Symptom Checker to help people recognise the numerous but varied symptoms. The Symptom Checker lists the main symptoms associated with iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia and brings them to life with an animated character, to further explain each symptom.

**Iron deficiency** is very common present in one-third of people around the world.<sup>2</sup> It is most prevalent in premenopausal and pregnant women and children under the age of five.<sup>3</sup> In Europe for example, iron deficiency affects up to 33% of pre-menopausal women, up to 77% of pregnant women, and up to 48% of children<sup>3</sup>. Iron deficiency is also frequently associated with chronic inflammatory diseases such as chronic heart failure, chronic kidney disease and irritable bowel disease.<sup>4</sup>

Iron is required throughout the body. It is essential for the production of red blood cells, and ensuring that the heart and skeletal muscles can function effectively.<sup>15</sup> Iron also plays a vital role in fighting off infections and illness,<sup>16</sup> maintaining energy levels<sup>16</sup> and normal brain function.<sup>17</sup> When the body's available iron stores are low (iron deficiency) it can impact almost all aspects of life such as metabolism, mental and physical health, work productivity and even sexual function.<sup>5, 17</sup> The World Health Organization states that iron deficiency can lead to a reduction of 30% in physical work output.<sup>18</sup>  
<sup>18</sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.

For more information visit [www.irondeficiencyday.com](http://www.irondeficiencyday.com).

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