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Simple Blood Test Could Save Your Life! I

Fortunately, in the last few years, healthcare consumers have sparked a renewed interest in preventive medicine in this country. People are taking more and more responsibility for their own health; this also means they have assumed an additional responsibility for learning and reading about health matters. This makes people like me happy, because I like to write about preventive health issues.

One of my favorite topics involves informing people about a simple blood test that can be obtained at their physicians' offices, and yet that could save their lives by preventing heart attack or cancer. Its use for early detection could also spare circulation problems, deteriorative brain disease (early memory loss), sexual dysfunction and impotence in males, occasional infertility in females, cirrhosis and puzzling night leg cramps in either sex, to name just few unpleasant conditions that can be related.

But so neglected is the test in the usual routine medical assessment, that you often have to ask for it yourself by name, and sometimes even demand it.

This is somewhat surprising, since they Center for disease control recommended in 1996 that every primary physician routinely screen his or her patients for Iron Overload Disease, or IOD. The best blood test to do this is a serum ferritin level. IOD is a devastating and even deadly illness from iron build-up. The serum iron blood test—a standard run in most doctors' offices—is not adequate to screen for IOD.

Iron is normally strictly regulated by the small intestine. Too much simply goes out in the stool; and too little is compensated for by its increase absorption through the intestinal wall. But, alas, this perfect system can go astray, and it does in as many as 1 million Americans with undiagnosed IOD. Unfortunately, some medical studies claim untreated IOD has only a 15% survival rate—worse than for many cancers… and it's entirely preventable, and easily treated, once diagnosed.

The devastation of IOD is thought to be due to an accelerating effect by the excessive iron on the body's production of free radicals. These are by-products of metabolism—compounds or fragments that are neutralized by anti-oxidants, like vitamins E, C and others, and by enzyme systems in the body. Sadly, the enzyme systems wear out, but anti-oxidant vitamins still help. Free radicals are greatly to blame for aging, age-associated diseases, and a general decline in the body's immune system.