**Hemochromatosis**

Hemochromatosis is an inherited disorder in which the body stores too much iron. This action is genetic and the excess iron, if left untreated, can damage joints, organs, and can eventually be fatal. Early signs and symptoms often are nonspecific, mimicking those of other common conditions. Most people don't experience signs and symptoms until later in life, usually between the ages of 50 and 60 in men and after age 60 in women. Women are more likely to develop symptoms after menopause, when they no longer lose iron with menstruation. Common symptoms include:

* Joint pain
* Fatigue
* Weakness

However, the first signs and symptoms of the disease in men are often from organ damage. They include:

* Joint pain
* Diabetes
* Loss of sex drive (libido)
* Impotence
* Heart failure

If left untreated, hereditary hemochromatosis can lead to a number of complications, especially in your joints and in organs where excess iron tends to be stored. Complications can include:

* Liver problems: **cirrhosis** (permanent scarring of the liver) is just one of the problems that may occur. Cirrhosis increases your risk of liver cancer and other life-threatening complications.
* Pancreas problems: **damage to the pancreas can lead to diabetes.**
* Heart problems: excess iron in your heart affects the heart's ability to circulate enough blood for your body's needs, causing **congestive heart failure**. Hemochromatosis can also cause abnormal heart rhythms (**arrhythmias**). Arrhythmias can cause heart palpitations, chest pain and lightheadedness.
* Reproductive problems: excess iron can lead to erectile dysfunction (**impotence**) and loss of sex drive in men and absence of the menstrual cycle in women.
* Skin color changes: deposits of iron in skin cells **can make your skin appear bronze** or gray in color.

For more information see: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hemochromatosis.html>

It is very important to get iron levels down to normal; therapeutic blood removal or phlebotomy is the most common means of iron reduction. Therapeutic phlebotomy (***TP***) is the same as regular blood donation but ***TP*** requires a doctor’s order (prescription). Regular blood donation can be done every 8 weeks.

If you do not know where to have your phlebotomy (***TP)*** done, please consult with your local Red Cross or primary care provider. The Red Cross offers low cost/sliding scale ***TP*** at their local blood donation centers (<http://www.redcrossblood.org/>). Additionally, you may soon be able to DONATE your ***TP*** blood at Red Cross Donation centers. Check this website periodically for an update on their policy (<http://www.redcrossblood.org/donating-blood/eligibility-requirements/eligibility-criteria-alphabetical-listing>).