Alpha Thalassemia Trait Fact Sheet

What is alpha thalassemia?

Alpha thalassemia is a condition which affects the hemoglobin in the blood. Hemoglobin is the part of the red blood cells that carries oxygen through the body. Alpha thalassemia is found most often in people of Asian origin, but it also regularly appears in people of African ancestry. People with alpha thalassemia trait or disease produce decreased amounts of one of the proteins that make up hemoglobin.

How does someone get alpha thalassemia trait?

Alpha thalassemia trait is inherited. It occurs when two of the genes that cause production of the hemoglobin part (mentioned above) are missing. Most often in African Americans, each parent passes along one missing gene. In Asians, both missing genes can be passed from the same parent. Alpha thalassemia trait may sometimes occur in combination with other hemoglobin diseases or traits, such as sickle cell or hemoglobin C.

What problems can alpha thalassemia trait cause?

People with alpha thalassemia trait often have a mild anemia (low blood count). Usually this low blood count does not cause symptoms or problems. Under the microscope, the red blood cells appear smaller than usual. If the affected person's doctor is not aware of the condition, alpha thalassemia trait may be mistaken for lack of iron. However, treatment with iron <u>is not</u> effective in raising the blood count in this condition.

Are there any special treatments for people with alpha thalassemia trait?

Most people who have alpha thalassemia trait do extremely well. As stated before, iron and vitamins will <u>not</u> raise the blood counts. No other treatments or special precautions are necessary. Your child should be able to live a normal life with this condition. The most important reason for informing you about this result is to prevent unnecessary treatment with extra iron.

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