

Patient Blood Management

Intravenous (IV) iron therapy

Understanding your treatment choice

Please read this leaflet carefully. It is a summary on intravenous (IV) iron therapy which is part of your hospital treatment.

What is iron?

Iron is an essential nutrient for your body. It is an important part of haemoglobin (Hb), the red pigment which gives blood its colour and which carries oxygen around your body. You need iron so your body can make new haemoglobin and red blood cells to carry the oxygen that your body requires. It is very important therefore that you have enough iron in your blood. If you don't, you may develop anaemia. This is known as iron-deficiency anaemia and is the most common type of anaemia.

Why do I need IV iron?

Your doctor may have prescribed you IV iron because your blood results have shown that the amount of iron you have in your blood is low and/or because you are feeling the effects of iron deficiency anaemia.

Factors that can lower your body's supply of iron include:

- Blood loss (caused by ulcers, some cancers and other conditions and monthly periods)
- A diet that doesn't have enough iron in it
- Taking medications that interfere with the ability of the body to absorb iron
- An increase in the body's need for iron (for example in women during pregnancy)



Patient Information

There are several symptoms that may occur in all types of anaemia. They are:

- Fatigue/tiredness
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness and light-headedness
- Pale skin colour
- A sore tongue
- Unusual cravings for non-food substances, such as dirt, ice, paint, or clay.
- Thin nails that may start to curve backward (called spoon nails)
- Poor muscle performance (for example, you may not be able to exercise for as long as usual)
- Restless leg syndrome. This means you have an irresistible urge to move your legs to relieve uncomfortable sensations, such as itching or a 'crawling' feeling.
- Feeling cold (including the sensation that your hands and feet are colder than usual)
- You may however have no obvious symptoms if your anaemia is mild or develops slowly over time.

What are the benefits of IV iron?

Your blood iron level will increase. This can result in your haemoglobin increasing as well. You may notice that you are less tired, have more energy, better concentration, and become less breathless when exercising.

How will I receive IV iron?

A small needle will be placed in a vein in your hand or arm. The iron will be given through a drip which takes about 30 minutes. You will be monitored closely before, during the infusion and after for at least 30 minutes.

How many infusions will I need?

You may only need a single dose of IV iron or you may need to return for further treatments to complete your course. Once you have finished your course of treatment, you may be asked to return to have a further blood test to assess your progress. At future appointments, your doctor or nurse will continue to check that the amount of iron in your body stays within the right range for you. You may also need further courses of treatment in the future.

What reactions might I have to iron?

Potential mild side effects occur in 1-10% of patients. These include:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Rash
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Muscle cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Abnormal liver function
- Flushing
- Low or high blood pressure
- Injection site reactions

On rare occasions, fluid can leak out of the cannula (the needle that goes into your vein) during the infusion. If this happens, it could cause long-term or even permanent discolouration or staining of your skin.

These reactions can occur at any time you receive the IV iron, so your nurse will monitor you closely at each appointment. The risk of an allergic reaction is increased in patients with known allergies, inflammatory conditions such as lupus, any drug allergies and severe asthma or eczema.

Patient Information

If you have any of the reactions, please contact your GP or your local Hospital (Medical Decisions Unit) on 024 769 6400.

Reporting of side effects

If you get any side effects, talk to your doctor or nurse. This includes any possible side effects not listed in this leaflet. You can also report side effects directly via the Yellow Card Scheme, Website:

www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard or search for MHRA Yellow Card in the Google Play or Apple App Store. By reporting side effects you can help provide more information on the safety of this medicine.

Before you receive iron injections

Please stop taking your iron tablets 5 days before coming to your first appointment. You should not receive iron injections if:

- You are known to be sensitive or allergic to any iron preparations intended for intramuscular or intravenous administration
- You are known to have damage to your liver
- You have any acute or chronic infections
- IV iron should not be used during pregnancy unless absolutely necessary and not in the first 3 months

Can I drive home after my infusion?

You may feel dizzy, confused or light-headed after being given IV iron. If this happens, do not drive or use any tool or machinery.

Using IV iron and not blood

IV iron is not a blood product. Although blood transfusion is safe, there are some risks, including a tiny risk of infection. IV iron does not have the risks of blood transfusion. If you have iron deficient anaemia, a blood transfusion is not an appropriate treatment as it does not solve the underlying problem of low iron levels.

Patient Information

Pregnancy and breast-feeding

It is important to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are planning to have a baby. If you become pregnant during treatment, you must ask your doctor for advice. Your doctor will decide whether or not you should be given this treatment. If you are breast-feeding, ask your doctor for advice before you are given IV iron.

If you require any further information about anaemia and have access to the internet you may find the following websites useful:

NHS Choice www.nhs.uk/conditions/Anaemia-iron-deficiency

NICE Guidelines www.nice.org.uk/anaemia-iron-deficiency

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact on 024 7696 4000 and ask for the Hospital Transfusion Team on Bleep 5918, 2280 or 4730 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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