

Intravenous (IV) Iron Infusions – Patient Information Sheet

What is an IV iron infusion?

Intravenous or 'IV' means giving something directly into the blood stream of the body through a vein. A needle placed into a vein is attached to a drip that contains iron mixed with saline (a sterile salt water solution). This fluid is slowly 'dripped' (infused) into the vein and mixes with the blood in your body.

Why is iron important?

Iron is essential for the body to make haemoglobin (Hb), a pigment that makes red blood cells red. When the amount of iron in the body gets too low, the haemoglobin level falls below normal. This is known as 'iron deficiency anaemia'.

Haemoglobin is very important as it carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. If your haemoglobin or iron levels are low this may make you feel tired and not able to carry out your normal routine.

Why might I need IV iron?

IV iron might be needed if you are:

- Unable to tolerate iron taken by mouth
- Unable to absorb iron through the gut
- Unable to absorb enough iron due to the amount of blood that the body is losing
- In need of a rapid increase in iron levels to avoid complications or a blood transfusion

Risks and benefits of IV iron

Your doctor will explain the risks, benefits and available alternatives to IV iron in your particular case. The most significant risk of IV iron is a small chance of having an allergic reaction which, in rare cases, can be life threatening. IV iron is prescribed for iron deficiency anaemia when oral iron is not tolerated, effective or likely to work quickly enough and the benefits of IV iron outweigh the risks in your particular case.

Alternatives to IV Iron

Iron Tablets: If you are able to tolerate and absorb iron taken by mouth this is the first option that should be tried (unless a more rapid increase in your Hb level is needed). If you get stomach (tummy) upset with iron tablets, a lower dose of iron as syrup can be tried and increased slowly as tolerated or iron tablets can be taken 2 or 3 times a week instead of daily– discuss this with your doctor as it is important that the right amount of iron is given.

Iron Injection: Injection of iron into muscle (IM) is not recommended as it is painful and can cause permanent skin scarring & discolouration.

Blood Transfusion: Transfusion can be life saving when severe anaemia or bleeding is present. It carries greater risks than IV iron and should be avoided unless an immediate increase in Hb level is needed (when benefits outweigh risks).

Diet: Once a person has already become low in iron and anaemic it is difficult to get enough iron back into the body even with a diet that is high in iron.

Types of IV iron in Australia

- *Iron polymaltose* (Ferrosig or Ferrum H) can be given in a single large dose over a number of hours
- *Iron sucrose* (Venofer) may be given as a series of small doses over a period of days or weeks
- *Iron carboxymaltose* (Ferinject) can be given as medium dose over about 15minutes

Comment [R.L.1]: What do we offer and why??? Ferinject and Ferrum H

Before you have IV iron:

Tell your doctor if you:

- Are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- Have a history of asthma, eczema or other allergies
- Have had a reaction to any type of iron injection or infusion in the past
- Have a history of high iron levels, haemochromatosis or liver problems
- Are on any medications (including over the counter or herbal supplements)

Side effects of IV iron

Patients receiving iron infusions can experience side effects including:

- Temporary changes in taste (e.g. metallic)
- Headache, feeling sick or vomiting
- Muscle and joint pain
- Shortness of breath
- Itchiness, rash
- Changes to blood pressure or pulse
- Burning and swelling at injection site

Severe side effects are rare; you will be closely monitored by nursing staff

Day of the iron infusion

- You will need to take the antihistamine (anti-allergy) medication at 7am as prescribed by the doctor
- You do not need to fast for an iron infusion. Have your usual breakfast or lunch
- Take all of your regular medications
- You can drive home after the infusion (unless there is an unexpected reaction) and resume usual activities
- The doctor/nurse will put a small IV drip in your arm/hand through which iron is given
- If you experience any side effects, inform staff immediately

After the iron infusion

Sometimes side effects can start one to two days after the infusion and include headache, mild fever, joint and muscle aches.

These generally settle down by themselves over the next few days.

If you are worried or side effects are interfering with your daily activities contact your doctor for advice.

If you have chest pain, difficulty breathing, dizziness or neck/mouth swelling, SEEK URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION or CALL AN AMBULANCE (000).

Iron tablets should be stopped for a week after an iron infusion because the iron in them will not be absorbed by the body. They are often not needed after IV iron infusions. Check with your doctor if and when iron tablets are needed. A blood test is recommended 1 month after the iron infusion to check iron levels.

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N. Moore. Revised by RL

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