

Intravenous (IV) Iron Infusion

Information for patients, families and carers

This leaflet answers some common questions about IV iron infusions. It does not contain all available information and does not take the place of talking to your doctor about your case.

Why is iron important?

Our bodies need iron. Iron is used to make haemoglobin – the part of our red blood cells that carries oxygen around our body. It is also important for muscle strength, energy and good mental function. If your iron levels are low this may make you feel tired and not able to do normal daily activities. As the amount of iron in the body falls even lower, the haemoglobin level drops below normal. This is known as iron deficiency anaemia.

What is an iron infusion?

The most common way to treat iron deficiency is to take iron by mouth as a tablet or liquid. This works well for most people and is usually tried first. Some people may need iron to be given straight into the body through a vein. This is called an Intravenous (IV) iron infusion. The iron is given through a needle and dripped ('infused') into your vein. Sometimes two iron infusions (given at least one week apart) are needed to fully top up iron stores. The infusion is made up of iron, not blood.

Why might I need an iron infusion?

IV iron might be needed if you:

- Are not able to take iron tablets / liquid
- Are not responding to iron tablets / liquid or not absorbing them
- Need to get your iron levels up quickly (eg. before major surgery, late in pregnancy or to avoid blood transfusion)
- If you have chronic kidney disease or chronic heart failure

Your doctor should explain why you need IV iron and the other options.

Are there any side effects with IV iron?

Generally, when side effects do occur, they are mild and settle down on their own. The most common side effects are temporary and include:

- Headache, feeling sick or vomiting, muscle or joint pain
- Changes in taste (eg. metallic)
- Changes to blood pressure or pulse

Another less common side effect is **Skin staining** (brown discolouration) which may occur due to leakage of iron into the tissues around the needle (drip) site. **This is not common but the stain can be long lasting or permanent.** Inform the doctor or nurse **immediately** of any discomfort, burning, redness or swelling at the needle (drip) site. To avoid skin staining you should minimise arm movement during the infusion.

Although very uncommon, some people may have a serious allergic reaction. In rare cases this can be life threatening. You will be closely monitored while IV iron is given, and for 30 minutes after.

Prior to starting your iron infusion, you will be asked to sign a consent form. While all precautions are taken, there is a low risk of side effects.



Before your infusion, please inform us if you:

- Are taking any medications, including herbal or over the counter medicines
- Are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, as iron should not be administered in the first 12 weeks (first trimester) of pregnancy
- Have a history of asthma, eczema, or other allergies
- Have had a reaction to an iron injection or iron infusion in the past
- Have a history of high iron levels, haemochromatosis, or liver problems
- Have or may have an infection at the moment

During your iron infusion:

Tell your nurse or a member of staff **immediately** if you experience any of the following symptoms during your iron infusion:

- Burning or swelling at the IV site (this can be a precursor to skin staining) any discomfort or pain, however minor, at the IV site
- Headache, dizziness, or nausea
- Muscle or joint pain
- Shortness of breath
- Itchiness or a rash

Please do not hesitate to speak up if you have any concerns or feel unwell during your infusion.

After you go home:

You can usually go home soon after the iron infusion has finished. It will take several weeks before the iron infusion takes full effect.

The side effects from an iron infusion are usually minimal, and some patients do not experience any side effects at all. However, you may experience headaches, mild fever, joint aches and muscle aches. This can occur between 1 and 8 days after the infusion.

If you are concerned about any symptoms that you experience, or find that your symptoms are interfering with your daily activities, please contact your general practitioner (GP).

If you experience chest pain, dizziness, breathing difficulties or neck/mouth swelling seek urgent medical attention or call an ambulance on 000.

If you are currently taking oral iron supplements, please discuss with your doctor whether or not these should be continued.

Disclaimer

All information contained in this patient information sheet is current at the time of release. If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your general practitioner or health care provider. If you require urgent care you should go to the nearest emergency department.