



Intravenous (IV) iron therapy

Your blood test results show that the amount of iron you have in your blood is low. You need iron so that your body can make new haemoglobin and red blood cells to carry the oxygen your body requires.

What is iron?

Iron is an essential part of haemoglobin (Hb), the red pigment which gives blood its colour and which carries oxygen around your body. Over time, low levels of iron can lead to anaemia, where red blood cells are either smaller and/or fewer than normal.

How will the iron be administered?

You will receive the iron by intravenous (IV) infusion – via a drip and pump, which takes approximately between 15-60 minutes, depending on the amount of iron administered.

What are the likely benefits of intravenous iron?

You may notice that you are less tired, have more energy, better concentration and become less breathless when taking exercise.

Who is not suitable for intravenous iron?

- People who are known to be sensitive (allergic) to any iron preparations intended for intravenous administration.
- People who are known to have liver damage.
- People who have any acute or chronic infections.

What are the risks / side effects of intravenous iron?

There are some potential side effects to having this injection.

- A metallic taste in your mouth. This normally disappears within 15 minutes.
- You might feel light headed, sick or dizzy. If you have these symptoms, please tell the person giving the injection.
- Other effects that you may notice include: lowering of blood pressure, tingling or numbness of the limbs, abdominal discomfort, muscular aches and pains, fever, rashes, skin flushing, swelling of the hands and feet and very rarely, anaphylactic like reactions (e.g. paleness, swollen lips, itchiness, weakness, sweating, dizziness, feeling of tightness in the chest, chest pain, fast pulse, difficulty in breathing).

If this happens after you have left the clinic, please go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) or your GP and tell them that you have had an iron infusion. This may be an allergic reaction to the iron and you will be given antihistamine medication.

Are there any alternatives?

You can take iron tablets but the latest research shows that they are not as effective as intravenous iron therapy. This is why you have been asked to have an infusion.

If you do choose to take iron tablets, please be aware that food, tea and milk can all reduce the absorption of iron from the gut, so these should be avoided for ONE hour before and after taking the iron supplement (iron absorption can be reduced by up to 67%).

You should take your iron supplements on an empty stomach (preferably one hour before a meal) with a drink containing vitamin C, such as a glass of orange juice or another juice drink with added vitamin C. New evidence has shown that taking iron supplements every other day may increase their effectiveness. The precise instructions for when to take your supplements will be discussed with you by the healthcare professional who prescribes them.

How long will I need to have the infusions?

You may need only a single dose of iron or you may need to return for further treatments to complete your course. At the end of treatment, you are likely to need a further blood test to assess your progress. You may also need further courses of treatment in the future.

Other important information

- Before you receive intravenous iron therapy, please stop taking any iron tablets the day before coming to your first appointment.
- After IV iron, stop taking any iron tablets for 5 days.
- After your treatment, if you feel well, you will be allowed to go home immediately.

Who can I contact with queries or concerns?

Tanya Hawkins, Transfusion Practitioner: 0118 322 8673 (Mon-Fri 8.30am – 5.00pm).

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Approved by the Hospital Transfusion Committee

Reviewed by Habib Wardak, November 2023

Next review due: November 2025