

# Intravenous (IV) iron infusions

## 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.

### Why might I need IV iron?

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 2 iron infusions (given at least 1 week apart) are needed to fully top up iron stores. The infusion is made up of iron, not blood.

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

**Skin staining** (brown discolouration) 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 straight away of any discomfort, burning, redness or swelling at the needle (drip) site.

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.

Sometimes side effects (eg. headache, muscle or joint pain) can start 1 to 2 days later. Mostly they will settle down by themselves over the next couple of days. If they worry you or interfere with your daily activities contact your doctor or infusion centre for advice. **If you have chest pain, trouble breathing, dizziness or neck / mouth swelling, please seek urgent medical attention / call an ambulance (000).**

Intravenous (IV) Iron Infusions (continued)

**What to tell your Doctor**

You need to tell your doctor and the centre doing your iron infusion if you:

- Are pregnant / trying to get pregnant. IV iron should be avoided in the first trimester.
- 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 herbal and over the counter medicines).
- Have (or may have) an infection at the moment.

**What to ask your Doctor**

You may wish to talk with your doctor about the following:

- Why do I need IV iron?
- What are the other options?
- About how long will the iron infusion take?
- How many iron infusions will I need to get enough iron?
- (If you are taking iron tablets at the moment), When do I stop taking iron tablets and will I need to use them again?
- How long will it take for the iron to work?
- Any questions about any side effects that may worry you (a general list is provided on the other side).

**What happens on the day?**

There is nothing special that you need to do to get ready for the day of iron infusion (eg. you don't need to fast). Unless you have an unexpected reaction, you will be able to drive home and do your normal activities. Before leaving the infusion centre, ensure that you have:

- > the number to contact if you have any worries or questions
- > the dates for any follow up tests and/or appointments

**My IV Iron Infusion Details:**

**Name of iron:**.....

**Infusion date(s) / time(s):** .....

.....

**Location:** .....

**Contact phone number:** .....

**Date(s) of blood test or review after IV iron:**.....

**Notes:** .....

.....

**For more information:**

**Talk to your doctor / infusion centre**

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\*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group (SQCAG).



Patient materials at:  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/bloodorgantissue](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/bloodorgantissue)