

## **Patient Information Leaflet - Intravenous Iron**

### **What is intravenous iron?**

Intravenous iron is when iron is administered as an infusion directly into a vein via a cannula. There are many reasons that iron may be given intravenously rather than in tablet form. It may be that the tablets have not worked in the past, you need faster replacement than oral tablets or that you are not able to absorb the iron from the tablets.

### **Why is iron replacement needed?**

Your blood tests have shown that you have iron deficiency anaemia. Iron treatment is given to correct this. Iron is important because it helps your body to make haemoglobin. Haemoglobin, or 'Hb', is found in red blood cells and carries oxygen around your body and gives blood its red colour.

### **What can happen if you have low iron levels?**

If the level of iron in your body drops, your red blood cells may not contain enough haemoglobin. At first, you may not notice any difference at all. However, if the amount of haemoglobin gets lower, you may start to feel tired. If the shortage of haemoglobin is more severe, you may feel unusually weak or breathless.

This is called anaemia. There are different types of anaemia, but the most common type is caused by a shortage of iron. Getting enough iron will help your body to work more efficiently.

Following an iron infusion, your blood level will increase and you may notice you are less tired and have more energy

### **What could happen if you don't receive iron?**

If you do not wish to have iron replacement, you may become or remain anaemic.

You may end up needing a blood transfusion to treat your anaemia. Blood transfusions are associated with some side effects and risks, such as possible allergic reactions to the donor blood.

### **Is there an alternative to intravenous iron?**

Iron supplements can be taken as a tablet. However, iron tablets may not treat your anaemia as well and they can also cause side effects such as constipation and nausea.

## Before you receive intravenous iron

If you are taking oral iron tablets, please stop these the day before the iron infusion. Your doctor will advise you if and when you should restart these following the iron infusion. Oral iron should not be restarted earlier than 5 days after your last injection of intravenous iron.

Please be aware that some over the counter remedies (e.g. multivitamins) may contain iron.

Make sure you inform your doctor or nurse if:

- You are unwell with an infection
- You have problems with asthma, eczema or problems with allergies or inflammation
- You have had a reaction to intravenous iron in the past
- You have any allergies (they need to check that the product is safe to give you)

If you are not sure if any of the above applies to you, talk to your doctor or nurse before having the intravenous iron.

## How will the iron be given?

Intravenous iron is given directly into a vein as an infusion.

Depending on the dose this will take between 15-30 minutes.

During the infusion you will have your blood pressure, heart rate and breathing rate monitored.

You will be required to stay for 30 minutes after the infusion for a final set of observations to make sure there are no ill effects from the infusion.

## Are there any side effects during the treatment?

Like all medications, intravenous iron can cause side effects, although not everyone will get them. The most significant reaction is an allergic reaction; this is rare and occurs in less than 1% of patients.

Make sure you should tell your nurse or doctor know immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Shortness of breath/chest tightness
- Rash, itch, hives, nettle rash or flushing

If you feel light headed, dizzy or sick, please tell your nurse or doctor who is giving you the injection. Other possible side effects include:

- Temporary changes in taste (things tasting metallic)
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Muscle and joint pain
- Abdominal discomfort
- Changes in blood pressure and pulse
- Burning sensation and swelling at infusion site

Irritation of the skin around where the infusion is given

Rarely, the iron infusion can cause discolouration of the skin around the infusion site. This is due to the iron solution leaking into the skin. It can cause permanent staining of the skin. If you feel any discomfort at the time of the infusion, please report it immediately to your nurse or doctor

### **After treatment**

The time taken to see an improvement in symptoms varies from person to person; some people will feel better after a couple of days whilst others may take a few weeks or a month to feel better.

You may need a second infusion if it is not possible to give you the full dose you require in one infusion. The amount that can be given at any one time is based on your body weight. If a second dose is needed this will be given at least 7 days after the first dose.

You will have blood tests carried out at some point after treatment to determine if your iron levels are fully corrected. Some patients may need more than one round of treatment; such as those with a chronic disease that causes their iron deficiency.

Version: 1.0  
Publication Date: June 2020  
Date of Next Review: June 2023  
Leaflet reference: PIL/CG/0804  
Responsible for review: Pharmacy