

Patient information service
Pharmacy

Intravenous iron



What is intravenous iron?

Intravenous (or IV) iron is a dark brown liquid containing iron that is given by injection or infusion (through a drip) into a vein.

It is used to treat low iron levels which can be caused by several reasons including iron deficiency anaemia or loss of blood. It is also used as an alternative to a blood transfusion.

Iron is important to your body because it can help to increase the production of haemoglobin (a protein found in red blood cells) that helps transport oxygen to cells of the body.

Intravenous iron is given to those who have been unable to tolerate an oral iron preparation or to patients whose oral iron preparations have been unsuccessful.

The aim of this treatment is to correct the level of iron in your body.

Intravenous iron is not a blood product so it is suitable for people who cannot have or do not want a blood transfusion for religious or cultural reasons.

How is intravenous iron given?

Intravenous iron may be given by a short injection but is most commonly administered as an infusion (diluted and given by a drip into a vein).

The form of administration depends on which intravenous iron you are having and how low your existing iron levels in the body are.

The infusion takes from just over 15 minutes up to an hour to give. You will be observed during and for around 15 minutes after the infusion. The doctor who is looking after you may

follow up with a blood test 2 to 4 weeks after the infusion, to check and see if further intravenous iron is required.

Safety and side effects

Like all medicines, intravenous iron can cause side effects. The most common ones are:

- headache
- muscle cramps
- dizziness
- diarrhoea
- flushing of the skin (hot and red)
- constipation
- nausea and vomiting
- low or high blood pressure
- abdominal pain
- abnormal liver function
- reaction at the site of injection/infusion.

Skin staining

A rare but significant complication of iron infusions is permanent skin staining or discolouration around the injection site or involving a more extensive area of the arm. This can occur if the iron leaks outside the vein during the infusion.

To reduce the risk, a small amount of sodium chloride (salt solution) is given into your vein before and after the iron infusion. It is very important that you let the healthcare professional giving you the infusion know if there is any pain or stinging at any point when either the salt solution or the iron infusion is being given.

You will need to keep your arm as still as possible so that the infusion does not dislodge from the vein while it is being given.

Serious side effects

There is a low risk that you may experience an acute hypersensitivity reaction when the iron is administered.

You must inform a member of the healthcare team immediately if you experience:

- a rash
- difficulty in breathing
- itching
- swelling of the lips, tongue, throat or body.



Notes

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