

Iron is a mineral that plays a key role in your body. The body needs iron to make red blood cells. Red blood cells work to carry oxygen and to deliver it to areas in the body where it is needed. When the number of red blood cells get low this is called anemia.

## What are the *possible* symptoms of low iron?

- Feeling tired
- Short of breath
- Dizzy
- Looking pale or yellowish
- Headaches
- Feeling very cold in your hands and feet
- Difficulty concentrating
- Restless legs
- Brittle nails, cracks at the side of your mouth, hair loss, and a sore smooth tongue
- Unusual cravings for non-food items such as ice, starches, clay/earth

## What *may* cause low iron levels?

- Excessive bleeding (in the stool or during menstrual periods)
- Problems absorbing iron
- Chronic inflammatory disorders
- Not enough iron in your diet
- Conditions that increase your need for iron like pregnancy
- You have chronic kidney disease and you are on **EPREX<sup>®</sup>**

## What are treatments to raise iron levels?

**1. Oral iron** - Oral iron pills are usually given first

**2. Intravenous iron infusions** - If oral iron cannot be taken, tolerated, or doesn't work you may be prescribed an iron infusion.

You may require an iron infusion if there is a short time to your surgery and/or you have been prescribed a medication called **EPREX<sup>®</sup>** (Erythropoietin). This is done to reduce the risk of having to have a blood transfusion.

There are 2 options for intravenous iron infusions:

Iron Sucrose (**VENOFER**<sup>®</sup>) or Iron isomaltoside (**MONOFERRIC**<sup>®</sup>)

### How it is given:

- Your health care provider will decide what dose and type medication you need and tell you how often you should get this medication
- You will be provided with a prescription if you have private insurance coverage, Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB), and/or are Ontario Drug Benefits (ODB) eligible and qualify for coverage
- You will be asked to fill your prescription and bring the medication to the Ambulatory Care Unit (ACU) for your infusion
- If you do not have any private insurance coverage, NIHB, and do not qualify for ODB the medication will be covered by the hospital
- A nurse will start an intravenous (small tube into a vein) and give you this medication
- The dose and length of treatment is based on your medical condition and how your body acts in response to treatment
- To be sure the iron infusions are helping your condition, your blood may need to be tested. This will help your doctor know how long and how often you need medication
- Be sure to keep all appointments
- Call ACU at (705) 474-8600 ext.3800 if you need to reschedule any iron infusion appointments

### Safety Measures before receiving an iron infusion:

- Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, the medications you take, including any drugs, vitamins, minerals, natural supplements or alternative medicines, any allergies, and any reactions you have had to iron infusions
- Iron infusions can reduce the effect of oral iron. Your health care provider may have you hold the oral iron or continue it depending on your specific situation

### Reactions to medication and what to do about them

Severe reactions are **rare**. Most reactions start during the infusion but also may occur at home. The nurse in the clinic will watch you closely during the iron infusion. When you go home, you need to watch for possible reactions. Some reactions you can treat at home. Some reactions need emergency help right away.

Reactions	How to avoid reaction	What you should do
<b>Common reactions: If any of these become bothersome contact your doctor</b>		
Altered taste	Do mouth care often, suck on hard, sugar-free candy, or chew sugar free gum.	
Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain	Eat small meals and drink a lot during the day (unless you are on a fluid restriction)	
Dizziness	Get up slowly over several minutes from sitting or lying down. Be careful climbing or driving.	Don't drive a car or work with machinery if you are sleepy.
Headache, fever muscle cramps (mainly leg cramps), stomach pain	Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) unless you are allergic or have a history of problems to the either of these medications e.g.kidney or liver issue Follow the package directions.	Go to Emergency Department if fever higher than 38°C or 100.4 ° F
Chest pain		Go to Emergency Department
Pain at the intravenous site		Place cold ice pack over the area for 10 minutes.
<b>Rare reactions:</b>		
Serious, sometimes life threatening allergic reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itching or rash</li> <li>• Swelling in your face or hands</li> <li>• Swelling or tingling in your face/tongue or throat</li> <li>• Chest tightness</li> <li>• Trouble breathing</li> <li>• Loss of consciousness</li> <li>• Fit of uncontrolled movement/seizure like</li> </ul>		Seek medical help <b>IMMEDIATELY</b> . <b>Do not</b> drive yourself.
Low blood pressure, with signs such as fainting, weakness, severe dizziness, heartbeat that feels too fast, too slow or uneven.		

**If you have any questions or concerns related to your medications, please contact your Family Physician's Office or your Retail Pharmacy**

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