

The top of the page features a teal border with a repeating geometric pattern of triangles and diamonds. Below this, the background is a dark blue with a subtle, larger-scale version of the same geometric pattern.

Te Whatu Ora

Health New Zealand

Intravenous (IV) Iron Infusions

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It is important to talk about IV Iron infusions with your doctor or midwife.

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 important for muscle strength, energy and good mental function.

If your iron levels are low, this may make you feel tired and unable to do normal activities. As the amount of iron in the body falls, 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 anaemia is to take iron by mouth as a tablet or liquid. This works well for most people but 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 cannula (small plastic tube) and dripped ('infused') into your vein. The infusion is made up of iron, not blood.

IV iron might be needed if:

- You have unwanted side effects when taking iron by mouth.
- Your gut doesn't absorb iron.
- You are losing too much blood to absorb enough iron.
- You need to get your iron levels up quickly
- You don't respond to iron tablets or liquid (e.g. due to chronic health problems)
- Have chronic kidney or heart failure

Benefits

IV iron is given when oral iron is not tolerated, effective or likely to work quickly enough and the benefits of IV iron are greater than the risks.

Alternatives to IV iron

Oral iron

This is the first option that should be tried (unless a quicker increase is needed). If you get stomach upset with iron tablets, we can try a lower dose of iron and then increase the dose slowly.

Iron tablets can be taken 2 or 3 times a week instead of daily – talk about this with your doctor or midwife as it is important that you get enough iron.

Many over the counter iron tablets claim to be gentle on the stomach but don't have enough iron in them to treat anaemia and can be expensive.

IM iron

We don't recommend injection of iron into muscle (IM). It is painful and can cause lasting skin scarring and discolouration.

Blood transfusion

Transfusion can be life-saving when severe anaemia or bleeding is present. It carries more risks than IV iron and should be avoided unless an increase in haemoglobin level is needed as quick as possible (when benefits are bigger than risks).

Diet

Once a person has already become low in iron and anaemic, it is difficult to get enough iron back into the body even with a diet that is high in iron.

How much iron is needed?

Your doctor or midwife will calculate how much iron you need.

Sometimes IV iron is given, then we suggest you either have a second infusion or take iron tablets in the coming months. If you take oral iron, you should not start it for at least one week after the infusion. The iron will take a few weeks to have

its full effect, and your doctor or midwife will do a blood test to see how you are responding.

Risks

There is a small chance of having an allergic reaction which can, in rare cases, be life threatening.

If you could be pregnant, let your doctor or midwife know as IV iron should be avoided in the first trimester in pregnancy.

Side effects of IV iron

For most people who have side effects, they are mild, don't last long and settle down on their own.

The most common side effects include:

- Temporary changes in taste (eg metallic),
- Mild fever
- Headache,
- Feeling sick or vomiting,
- Muscle and joint ache or pain,
- Shortness of breath,
- Itchiness, rash,
- Changes to blood pressure or pulse,
- Burning and swelling at injection site.

Severe side effects are rare. You will be closely monitored for any signs of these side effects.

Skin Staining with IV iron

Skin staining (brown discolouration) may occur if iron leaks into the tissues around the cannula 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 cannula site.

Day of the iron infusion

- Have your breakfast/lunch. You do not need to fast for an iron infusion.
- Take all of your regular medications.
- The iron will be given through a small IV drip which will be put in your arm.
- If you experience any side effects, inform your nurse immediately.

After the iron infusion

You can drive home after the infusion and resume usual activities (unless there is an unexpected reaction).

Sometimes side effects can start 1 to 2 days after the infusion. These generally settle down by themselves over the next few days. If they are worrying you, or stop you doing your daily activities, get in touch your doctor or midwife or infusion centre.

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:

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Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand
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