

Receiving an Intravenous Iron Infusion

This leaflet has been written for you if you have been advised that you have low iron levels and are recommended an iron infusion or intravenous iron. It is intended to give information about why an infusion is recommended and what to expect during the procedure. If you have more questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact a member of staff.

What is iron deficiency anaemia?

Anaemia is a condition caused by a lack of red blood cells or haemoglobin. In the UK, the most common reason for developing anaemia is not having enough iron.

Haemoglobin is a protein found in red blood cells. It carries oxygen from the lungs around the body. A key component of haemoglobin is iron and this gives blood its red colour. If there is not enough iron stored in the body, then the amount of haemoglobin will fall and when haemoglobin reaches a low level, less oxygen can be carried in the blood.

What causes iron deficiency anaemia?

A normal balanced diet will usually contain enough iron for your body's needs. Your body uses iron to make haemoglobin. Without the necessary amount of iron, your body cannot make enough haemoglobin.

Your body's store of iron can be decreased by:

- Blood loss (e.g., from stomach ulcers, some cancers and women with their monthly periods)

- A diet which is low in iron
- An increase in the body's need for iron (e.g., in women during pregnancy)
- Malabsorption, where your body is not able to absorb iron (e.g., coeliac disease).

Why do I need an iron infusion?

- Intravenous iron is used to treat a low iron concentration in your body. This may have occurred due to low amounts of iron in your diet, a problem with your body's ability to absorb and use iron or it may be because of blood loss.
- Intravenous iron is a highly effective method to replenish your body's stores of iron and hopefully to allow you to increase your red blood cell count over the coming days and weeks.
- Intravenous iron allows a much larger dose of iron to be given than iron in tablet form.

What are the likely benefits of iron infusions?

Your blood iron level will increase and this may result in your haemoglobin increasing as well. You may notice that you are less tired, have more energy, better concentration and become less breathless when taking exercise.

What are the alternatives?

Oral iron is used initially to treat iron deficiency anaemia. Sometimes this does not produce enough of an improvement, may not be tolerated or absorbed, or it may be that your doctor needs to replenish your iron quickly. Intravenous iron is used when oral iron has been tried or if it is not suitable and it helps to reduce the use of blood transfusions. In the long term, both tablets and infusions have similar effects.

Are there occasions where an iron infusion should not be given?

- If you are known to be allergic to any iron preparations intended for infusion.
- If you have some acute or chronic conditions, please ensure you have had a discussion with your doctor / nurse prior to making this appointment
- You are known to have liver damage
- You are in your first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Before you receive an iron infusion

Please stop taking your iron tablets the day before coming to your first appointment.

Inform your nurse / midwife or doctor:

- If you are unwell with an infection
- If you have allergies, asthma, eczema or immune or inflammatory conditions
- If you are taking any other medications or over the counter remedies or herbal medicines. This is because the iron infusion can affect the way some medicines work. Similarly, some medicines can affect the way the infusion works.
- If you are not sure whether any of the above applies to you, talk to your doctor or nurse before having intravenous iron.

Potential side effects of intravenous iron

Iron infusions are considered very safe but like all medicines, can have some side effects that include:

- a metallic taste in your mouth. This usually subsides within 15 minutes of you having the infusion.
- you might feel sick, light-headed or dizzy
- very rarely, anaphylactic-like reactions, for example, paleness, swollen lips, weakness, sweating, tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing and a fast pulse.

Please inform the person giving you the infusion if you experience any of these symptoms.

- Other side effects or adverse reactions following treatment of intravenous iron include:
 - low blood pressure
 - tingling or numbness of the limbs
 - abdominal discomfort
 - muscular aches and pains
 - fever or rash
 - skin flushing
 - swelling of the hands and feet
 - A rare but significant complication of an iron infusion is permanent staining or discolouration of the skin. This can occur at the site of the infusion or on other areas of the body (e.g., face, legs).

If any of these symptoms occur while you are having your infusion, please alert a member of staff immediately. If you have been discharged, please contact your GP or NHS 111 and tell them you have had an intravenous iron infusion. This may be an allergic reaction and you will need to be treated for this.

After your iron infusion you will be given the patient information leaflet which is included in the pack with the medicine.

What do I need to do on the day of the iron infusion?

There is no preparation needed for an iron infusion.

- You do not need to fast, so have your usual breakfast or lunch.
- Take all your regular medicines (except iron tablets).
- Drink plenty of fluids; this makes it easier to find a vein for the drip / infusion.

If you experience any side effects during the iron infusion or after it is completed, inform your nurse or midwife immediately.

How will the iron be given?

Intravenous iron is given directly into a vein. The infusion will run into your vein from a drip and you will be monitored by a nurse throughout the procedure.

How long will the iron infusion take?

The time used for an infusion depends on your body weight and the iron dose needed. An infusion will take approximately 15-30 minutes. Once the infusion has finished, you will have your observations measured again. It is recommended that you stay for 30 minutes after your infusion has finished to observe that you have not developed any immediate side effects.

After the iron infusion

It's always important to monitor your own health after an iron infusion. If you experience any significant symptoms (for example, chest pain or difficulty breathing) contact your GP or

NHS 111 as soon as possible or go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

It may be necessary for you to receive a second infusion in one week, depending on the amount of iron that you need.

Your doctor, nurse or midwife will advise you when to start taking your iron tablets again, usually ONE week after the infusion. You will need to have blood tests six weeks after the infusion to make sure it has worked. You will be given details of when and where to attend for these blood tests at your infusion appointment.

Further information

NHS Choices iron deficiency anaemia

[Iron deficiency anaemia - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the above information, please contact the team that arranged the appointment for you.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:
Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm
Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

