

Intravenous Iron Therapy for Anemia (Information for Patients)

Why is iron important?

Iron is an essential mineral. It is part of hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of the blood, and is essential for red blood cell production. With severe iron deficiency, patients may develop a low red blood cell count, a condition known as anemia.

Why does oral iron in pill form not work as well as intravenous iron?

Some patients may have side effects from oral iron pills, or have difficulty absorbing oral iron. It can also take many months of oral pills to reach the same dose as what can be given in a single intravenous infusion.

Who should receive intravenous iron?

Patients who cannot tolerate or absorb oral iron, as well as those with severe iron deficiency anemia. This means:

- Low red blood cells – hemoglobin level less than 110 g/L (grams per litre).
- Low iron level – ferritin under 30 µg/L (micrograms per litre), **or** under 200 µg/L with iron saturation less than 20%.

Your iron levels on ____/____/____ (dd/mm/yy) were:

- hemoglobin _____g/L
- ferritin _____ µg/L
- iron saturation _____%

What are the risks of intravenous iron?

Common side effects (1 in 20 patients) include low blood pressure (dizziness), muscle cramps, joint pain, headache, injection site swelling, chest discomfort, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea. Serious allergic reactions (rashes, face swelling and wheezing) are rare.

After receiving the iron infusion, you will be monitored for 30 minutes to make sure you do not have an allergic reaction or a drop in blood pressure.

If you have any serious reactions after leaving the clinic, proceed immediately to the closest emergency department.

Which forms of intravenous iron will be offered to me?

Two products are supplied by Sunnybrook's pharmacy: iron sucrose (Venofer[®]) and ferumoxytol (Feraheme[®]). Your doctor will discuss which is more appropriate to treat your anemia.

What if I'm scheduled to undergo an MRI while being treated with intravenous iron?

Feraheme[®] may alter magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) for up to 3 months. MRI should be performed before Feraheme[®] if at all possible and delayed for 3 months after Feraheme[®] therapy. X-ray, ultrasound, computer tomography (CT) and other imaging are **not** affected. If you have received Feraheme[®] within 3 months, your doctor may prefer to order one of the above tests in place of MRI. *Venofer[®] does NOT affect MRI imaging.*

How much intravenous iron do I need?

Patients may require one to three doses one week apart, or longer, depending on the degree of iron deficiency anemia and which intravenous iron product is prescribed. Each Venofer[®] infusion is given over a period of 2 hours. Feraheme[®] is given over a period of 5-15 minutes.

You do not need to take your oral iron pills on the day you receive the intravenous iron.

Do I need to pay for my intravenous iron infusions and how much do they cost?

Patients are responsible for covering the cost of their intravenous iron. The cost of Venofer[®] (\$145 for a dose of 300 mg) and Feraheme[®] (\$230 for a dose of 510 mg) is very similar (each costs about \$0.46 per mg of iron). The dispensing fee is included in these figures.

If Venofer[®] or Feraheme[®] are not on your insurance company's list of covered medications, you are responsible for paying for the product.

If you are covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit Program (65+ years old, or with Ontario Works, Trillium or ODSP), **intravenous iron is NOT covered.**

How do I obtain my intravenous iron supply?

You should fill your prescription for intravenous iron **at a Sunnybrook Pharmacy**, since many community pharmacies may not routinely stock it. Patients are responsible for picking up their medication and bringing it to their scheduled infusion appointment.

If your intravenous iron is prescribed by an Odette Cancer Centre doctor:

- Call the Odette Pharmacy at 416-480-4671 and provide your private insurance or credit card information.
- Be sure to pick up your prescription from the Odette Pharmacy.
- If you pick up the medication before your infusion appointment, store it at room temperature.
- Remember to bring it with you on the day of your scheduled infusion.
- If you pick up your prescription on the day of your infusion, arrive at the pharmacy **at least 15 min before your appointment.**

If you are NOT a patient of the Odette Cancer Centre:

- Call the M1 Outpatient Pharmacy at 416-480-4502 and provide your private insurance or credit card information.
- Be sure to pick up your prescription from the M1 Pharmacy.
- If you pick up the medication before your infusion appointment, store it at room temperature.
- Remember to bring it with you on the day of your scheduled infusion.
- If you pick up your prescription on the day of your infusion, arrive at the pharmacy **at least 15 min. before your appointment.**

What if I'm scheduled for another infusion and need more intravenous iron?

It is your responsibility to call the pharmacy where you had your original prescription filled **at least 2-3 days before your next dose**, so that it will be ready for you to pick up.

- M1 Pharmacy: 416-480-4502
- Odette Pharmacy: 416-480-4671

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NOTE: Folded, 3-panel, printed pamphlet can be ordered from Print Shop (PR 13094)