

# When you need Erythropoietin before your surgery

## Blood Conservation Program Hamilton Health Sciences

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For more information about the Blood Conservation Program at Hamilton Health Sciences, please call:

Linda Pickrell, RN  
ONTraC Patient Blood Management Coordinator  
905-521-2100, extension 75836

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Anemia is the medical term that means you do not have enough red blood cells.

Red blood cells are important because they contain hemoglobin which carries oxygen from your lungs to your tissues and cells. Your body needs oxygen in order to survive and to give you energy. Having a low hemoglobin level increases the risk of possibly needing a blood transfusion during or after surgery.

Your doctor has prescribed a medication, called **Erythropoietin**, to help increase your hemoglobin level and reduce your risk of needing a blood transfusion.

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## **What is Erythropoietin (EPO) and what are the benefits?**

- Erythropoietin (EPO) is made in your body by your kidneys. It helps your body make more red blood cells.
- EPO can also be man made to act like your body's own erythropoietin.
- EPO can increase your body's number of red blood cells before an operation.
- EPD can lower your chances of needing a blood transfusion.

## **How do I take EPO?**

EPO is given by a needle under the skin, the same way people with diabetes take their insulin. The most common dosage is one needle a week, starting 2 to 4 weeks before your surgery.

## **What does the doctor need to know about me?**

- Any allergies.
- Medications – prescription, over-the-counter and herbal.

## **Will I need to have any tests while I take EPO?**

Your blood will be tested during the treatment to make sure the EPO is working.

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## What else do I need to do?

You will need to take iron pills while being treated with EPO. It is important to take the iron pills as prescribed by your doctor, since the EPO and iron work together to increase the number of red blood cells in your body.

Erythropoietin therapy is not paid for by the hospital. The current cost of erythropoietin is \$466.36 per dose. Your doctor may prescribe 2 to 4 doses prior to your surgery. This cost may be covered by:

- private health insurance
- Ministry of Health Ontario Drug Benefits Plan
- Trillium Drug Benefit Program

The Blood Conservation Program at Hamilton Health Sciences will make every effort to see if the medication cost can be covered for you before you begin your therapy.

If you do not qualify for cover, you can:

- choose to go ahead with erythropoietin therapy which you will have to pay for yourself

**OR**

- have your surgery without erythropoietin therapy

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