

# Your intravenous iron therapy

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## What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that is part of hemoglobin which carries oxygen in blood. Iron helps produce red blood cells.

If your iron is low, you may have a low red blood cell count (called anemia). As a result, your blood carries less oxygen to the cells in your body. This can make you feel weak, tired and look pale.

## Who should receive intravenous (IV) iron therapy?

You should receive IV iron therapy if you cannot tolerate or absorb oral iron, or if you have severe iron deficiency anemia, or at the discretion of your ordering physician. This means:

- Low red blood cells – hemoglobin level less than 110 g/L
- Low iron level – ferritin under 30  $\mu\text{g/L}$  (micrograms per litre), or under 100  $\mu\text{g/L}$  with iron saturation less than 20%.

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

Some people 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 iron infusion.

## How much IV iron therapy do I need?

This depends on the degree of iron deficiency anemia, if there is ongoing bleeding, and which IV iron product is prescribed. If you are taking oral iron, the ordering physician will advise you on any changes to your dosing schedule.

## What are the side effects of IV iron?

Common side effects include low blood pressure (dizziness), muscle cramps, joint pain, headache, injection site swelling, skin discoloration, chest discomfort, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, metallic taste, fever and chills. These happen in about 1 in 20 patients. People who receive monoferric® may experience low phosphate in their blood; phosphate levels are monitored if more than one dose is ordered. Serious allergic reactions are rare and include rashes, face swelling and wheezing. If you experience severe side effects, please seek medical attention right away and notify the ordering physician.

After receiving IV iron therapy, you will be monitored for 30 minutes to make sure you do not have an allergic reaction or a drop in blood pressure. After the infusion, you can drive yourself home and return to your usual activities. If you have side effects, they may last up to 1 week after the infusion and will usually go away on their own. Tylenol can be used to treat headache and muscle aches.

If you have any serious reactions (chest pain, difficulty breathing, neck and mouth swelling) after leaving the clinic, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department.

## Which forms of IV iron will be offered?

- iron sucrose (Venofer®) and
- iron isomaltoside (Monoferric®)

The following chart outlines each iron therapy option, the required number of clinic visits/infusions needed and cost of treatment. Your doctor will discuss with you which option is best to treat your anemia.

Treatment option	# of Required Clinic Visits/Infusions for Total Dose of Elemental Iron (mg)		Approximate cost per 100 mg	Approximate infusion time/visit
	1000 mg or less	1100-2000 mg		
<b>Venofer</b>	2-5 visits	6-10 visits	\$45	300 mg is given over ~90-120 min
<b>Monoferric</b>	1 visit	2 visits	\$52	1000 mg is given over ~30-60 min

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## How long is my IV iron therapy?

Patients are required to come 30 minutes prior to the infusion to pick up the iron from the pharmacy. The length of the iron infusion appointment depends on 1) type of iron you receive, 2) the dose of iron you receive 3) whether you need additional medications prior to the start of the infusion. There is a 30-minute post-assessment period following the iron infusion. Hence, the total time may range from 2-4 hours.

## How will I pay for my IV iron therapy?

There are 3 different options you may use to pay for your IV iron therapy.

### Option 1: Private Insurance

Your private insurance provider may cover the cost of your IV iron therapy through your insurance plan. You may need to provide the drug identification number listed here:

IV Iron Drug Identification Numbers	
02243716	Venofer®
02477777	Monoferic®

### Option 2: Exceptional Access Coverage (EAP)

If you are covered for medications under a government program (Trillium, Ontario Works, Disability Support Program, OHIP+, or are a senior 65 years or older), you may be eligible for Venofer through the exceptional access program, or Monoferic if you meet specific criteria as determined by your health care provider. Our Drug Access Facilitator will work with your doctor and if needed, can help you apply to the Trillium Drug Program.

### Option 3: Special Considerations

If you do not have private or EAP coverage and are unable to pay for your IV iron therapy on your own, our Drug Access Facilitator will work with you to understand your case and discuss other options to afford your drugs.

**Contact our Drug Access Facilitator at 905-521-2100, ext. 64223 to help you with this process and to review your options**

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## Where do I pick up my dose for IV iron?

Please call the HHS Outpatient Pharmacy 2 days prior to your appointment to fill your IV iron prescription. Pick up your dose at the HHS Outpatient Pharmacy 30 minutes before and bring with you to the appointment.

The three Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) pharmacies providing this service are:

- **McMaster Drugstore: 905-521-5019**
  - Located in the main lobby of McMaster University Medical Centre near the gift shop, across from Admitting.
  - Hours: Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm (except on holidays)
  
- **Hamilton General Drugstore: 905-577-8259**
  - Located in the main lobby of the Hamilton General Hospital near the information kiosk, across from Admitting.
  - Hours: Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm (except on holidays)
  
- **Juravinski Cancer Centre Pharmacy: 905-575-6320**
  - Located on the second floor of the Juravinski Cancer Centre, across from the Supportive Care reception.
  - Hours: Monday to Friday, 8 am to 5 pm (except on holidays)

**Go to the pharmacy 30 minutes before your infusion appointment to pick up your dose of IV iron. Bring it with you to your appointment.**

If you have any other questions or concerns, speak with your doctor or contact the Drug Access Facilitator at 905-521-2100, ext. 64223 for more information.