

Taking Iron Supplements

Information for patients



Why do I need to take iron supplements?

We have recommended that you take iron supplements because you are anaemic or at risk of developing anaemia. This is because the iron stores in your body are low.

How do the supplements work?

Iron is needed for the production of haemoglobin, which is an essential ingredient in red blood cells. Haemoglobin is very important, as it carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body.

If you don't have enough iron you can develop anaemia, which means you aren't making enough red blood cells to carry oxygen around your body. You may become breathless, tired and have a lack of energy, your skin may become pale and you may have palpitations (noticeable heartbeats).

Which types of iron supplements are available?

The main types of iron supplements used are:

- ferrous sulphate (high strength tablets)
- ferrous fumarate (high strength tablets or syrup)
- ferrous gluconate (medium strength tablets)
- Sytron® syrup (sodium ferredetate) (low strength).

How do I take them?

You should take your iron supplement on an empty stomach (preferably one hour before a meal) with a drink containing vitamin C, such as a glass of orange juice or another juice drink with added vitamin C.

Why is the way I take them important?

Absorption of iron from the gut is reduced by food, tea and milk, so these should be avoided for one hour before and after taking the iron supplement.

Some medications also affect absorption of iron from the gut, particularly medications which reduce stomach acid (antacids) and certain antibiotics. Always check with your Doctor or Pharmacist whether any of your other medicines might affect how your iron supplements work.

The only factor that improves the absorption of iron is vitamin C. This is why we recommend that you take your supplement with a drink containing vitamin C.

What side effects might I get?

The following side-effects are common:

- tummy upset
- nausea (feeling sick)
- tummy pain
- diarrhoea
- constipation.

These usually improve as your body gets used to the iron supplements. If needed, you can reduce the dose to once a day and/or request a lower strength supplement. If this is better for you, try to then increase back to your original dose. Contact the healthcare professional that prescribed the iron tablets if you have any concerns.

What happens now?

You will be asked to have a repeat blood test 2-4 weeks after the start of your iron supplements, to check for a response to the treatment.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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