

## What is Iron Therapy?

Iron therapy is an effective treatment for Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA) aimed at replenishing the iron stores in the body to improve the haemoglobin levels and restore the healthy functions of the blood. Iron supplements can be administered either orally or via intravenous infusion depending on the severity of the condition.

### Oral Iron Therapy

#### What are the advantages and disadvantages of Oral Iron Therapy?

##### Advantages:

Oral iron therapy offers an easy and convenient way to replenish iron stores. Oral iron supplements (also known as iron tablets) are comparatively inexpensive. Hence, it is the recommended treatment for patients who suffer from mild IDA where there is no urgency to replenish the iron stores quickly.

##### Disadvantages:

The ingestion of the iron supplements may cause side effects such as nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, constipation and dark stools. Due to the small dosage and varying absorption rates, it can take 3-6 months before normal iron levels are restored.

### Intravenous Iron Therapy

#### What is Intravenous Iron Therapy?

Intravenous Iron Therapy is a procedure where iron is administered into the body through the vein. This method of administering iron intravenously is also called an iron infusion.

It is the recommended therapy for patients suffering from severe iron deficiency or existing intestinal conditions that affect the absorption of oral iron supplements.

## Who should receive Intravenous Iron therapy?

- Those who cannot tolerate oral iron supplements.
- Those who are unable to absorb iron adequately such as those with chronic malabsorption conditions.
- Those with continuous blood loss where oral iron supplements are unable to replenish the iron stores fast enough. For example, women with heavy periods.
- Those who require rapid correction of their iron deficiency.

## What are the advantages and disadvantages of Intravenous Iron Therapy?

### Advantages:

- Patients having iron infusions can avoid the side effects of oral supplements such as nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and constipation.
- It works faster than oral iron therapy to improve haemoglobin levels. Patients should start feeling improvements shortly after their treatment.

### Disadvantages:

- It is less convenient compared to oral iron therapy as it requires venous access and the procedure needs to be done in clinic.
- In some cases, patients may develop allergic reactions or low blood pressure during treatment.

## What to expect during Intravenous Iron Therapy?

A small cannula is inserted into a vein in your arm. A tube is then connected to the cannula through which the iron solution is given. The infusion usually takes 2-4 hours. However, newer preparations of intravenous iron can be given more quickly (less than 30 minutes).

## What are the common side effects of Intravenous Iron Therapy?

You may experience some side effects right after the procedure, most of which are mild. These include:

1. Temporary changes in your taste of food and drinks
2. Headache
3. Nausea and vomiting
4. Muscle and joint pain
5. Breathlessness
6. Itchiness and rash
7. Increased or decreased blood pressure or heart rate
8. Burning sensation or swelling at the site of injection

## How long will I need Iron Replacement for?

It depends on the underlying cause of the iron deficiency and whether there is still ongoing blood loss. If the underlying cause of iron deficiency is addressed, an average of 3-6 months of oral iron supplement is required, or several courses of intravenous iron given over a period of a few weeks. However, if the cause of iron deficiency is chronic then a longer duration of iron replacement will be necessary.

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