

**What side effects might I get? How can I reduce them?**

Not everybody gets side effects from iron tablets or liquid. If you do, they often improve as your body gets used to them. Another option is to reduce how often you are taking your iron supplement. Sometimes, changing to a different iron tablet can help BUT if you change to a tablet or liquid with a lower amount of iron, it may not work to replace the low iron levels.

**Side effects may include:**

Constipation and diarrhoea.  
Having more fluid and fibre in your diet can help reduce constipation. If needed, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice about a gentle laxative.  
Tummy upset, nausea (feeling sick) or tummy pain (cramps).  
Taking iron with food or at night can help.  
It is normal for iron tablets to make

**What if I cannot manage the side effects?**

Some people are not able to tolerate iron tablets or iron liquid. If this does happen to you, don't worry as iron can be given by injection into your vein. Let your doctor know if you cannot take your iron supplements

**How long will I need to take iron tablets?**

This depends on the reason for your lack of iron and how you respond to treatment. A course of treatment is usually recommended for 3 months at first. Then the iron levels in the blood (ferritin and haemoglobin) should be rechecked to see if a longer course of iron is needed. These blood tests can either be done in the HHAU day ward or by your GP.

**If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the NCC**

[National Coagulation Centre](#)

[St James's Hospital](#)

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## ORAL IRON

### Patient Information Leaflet



CUH

Ospidéal Ollscoile Chorcaí  
Cork University Hospital



Galway University Hospitals

Ospidéal na h-Ollscoile Gaillimh  
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL GALWAY  
MERLIN PARK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

National Coagulation Centre

## WHAT IS IRON

Iron is very important for our body. We need it to make haemoglobin.

Haemoglobin is in our red blood cells and it helps us to carry oxygen around the body. It is also important for muscle strength, energy and good mental function. If your iron levels are low this may make you feel tired and not able to do normal everyday activities. The ferritin level measures your body's iron stores and becomes low first. As the amount of iron in the body falls even lower, the haemoglobin level drops below normal. This is known as iron deficiency anaemia.

**What causes low iron? There are many reasons including:**

- Blood loss due to
  - 1) Heavy periods
  - 2) Heavy nosebleeds
  - 3) Bleeding from the back passage or bowel
- After pregnancy and childbirth
- People who don't have many or any sources of iron in the food they eat e.g. people who don't eat much red meat

People who have issues absorbing iron

Difficulty e.g. coeliac disease, inflammatory bowel disease.

It is always important to understand why somebody's iron levels are low.

People with bleeding disorders may have more bleeding episodes or heavier bleeding than other people.

### **Why do I need to take iron tablets?**

In order to increase the iron levels, we advise you to take a course of iron tablets (also known as supplements). Increasing the amount of iron in the food you eat, on its own will not get enough iron back into your body. The tablets contain much higher levels of iron than food and help to replace the iron much quicker. You don't need a prescription to buy iron supplements.

### **How Much Oral Iron Supplement Do I**

**Need?** The amount of iron in different tablets or liquids varies quite a lot. It is important that you take the tablet recommended by your doctor, as many types of iron preparations may only contain very small amounts of iron and not be adequate to treat low levels.

**In the NCC your hematologist recommends the following.**

- 1) **Galfer Tablets contains:** 305mgs of ferrous fumerate which is equivalent to 100Mg elemental iron.
- 2) **Ferrograd C contains:** 325mgs of ferrous sulphate which is equivalent to 105mg elemental iron as well as Vitamin C.

**How do I take iron tablets?** Follow the

instructions given by your doctor about how many tablets you should take and when to take them but 1-2 tablets every second day is often recommended. Iron is best absorbed on an empty stomach (one hour before or two hours after a meal) with a glass of water or juice. Vitamin C in fruit juice can help a bit more iron get into the body but is not essential – water is fine.

> **DO NOT** take your iron tablet with tea, coffee, milk, chocolate, cola or wine as these reduce the amount of iron absorbed by the body

> **DO NOT** take the following medicines at the same time as iron tablets -calcium; antacids (eg. Mylanta and Gaviscon); some medications for osteoporosis, thyroid disorders or Parkinsons; some antibiotics. Check with your doctor or pharmacist for advice if you are taking any other medicines for advice on taking iron tablets.