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# Patient Information

## Taking Iron Supplements

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## Patient Information Leaflet

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

Anecdotal evidence suggests that ferrous fumarate is the best tolerated iron medication. Please ask your doctor to prescribe this if you have had difficulty taking other preparations.

### 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. If you do not have any orange juice, then it is fine to take the iron supplement with water.

### 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 if possible.

## 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. It is rare for anyone to need to take iron tablets more than once a day. If you are taking supplements more than once a day it can increase the likelihood of having side effects. If this occurs, try taking the supplements on alternate days. 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 two to four weeks after the start of your iron supplements to check for a response to the treatment.

We ask for information about you so that you can receive proper care and treatment. This information remains confidential and is stored securely by the Trust in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018/GDPR. Further guidance can be found within our privacy notice found on our Trust website: [www.mkuh.nhs.uk](http://www.mkuh.nhs.uk)

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