



Taking iron supplements

Your doctor has recommended you take iron tablets to replenish the iron stores in your body. Your doctor will let you know the correct dose for you. Iron is also available in liquid form for infants and children.

This leaflet gives advice on the best way to take your iron supplements to make them most effective.

Important advice

To improve the chances that your body will absorb the iron in the tablets, you may be instructed to:

- **Take iron tablets on an empty stomach.** If possible, take your iron tablets first thing in the morning when your stomach is empty and don't eat until 1 hour afterwards. If not possible, then take 1 hour before and 2 hours after food. However, iron tablets can upset your stomach, causing either constipation or diarrhoea, indigestion or stomach pain. If you experience these side effects, try taking your iron tablets with or after meals. You can also try taking them every other day. If this doesn't help, your doctor or pharmacist can suggest a different iron preparation that you may find easier to take.
- **Don't take iron with antacids (indigestion medicines).** Medications that immediately relieve heartburn symptoms can interfere with the absorption of iron. Take iron 2 hours before or 4 hours after you take antacids.

What are the risks of taking iron supplements?

- As mentioned earlier, iron can upset your stomach, causing either constipation or diarrhoea, indigestion or stomach pain.
- Iron supplements may turn your stools black; this is a harmless side effect.

How long before the iron supplements work?

Iron deficiency can't be corrected overnight. You may need to take iron supplements for several months or longer to replenish your iron reserves. Generally, you'll start to feel better after a week or so of treatment.

Normally, you will have your blood rechecked to measure your iron levels 1 month after starting the iron treatment. If you are responding, you should keep taking the supplement and the levels will be checked again 2 months later. To be sure that your iron reserves are replenished, you may need to take iron supplements for a year or more.

If you are not responding to the iron therapy, your doctor will review the situation and, if necessary, refer you to an appropriate specialist.

Always keep iron supplement tablets out of the reach of children. An overdose of iron in a young child can be fatal.

Further advice

Please be aware that some iron supplements contain gelatin; if this is a problem for you, please make your prescriber or pharmacist aware so that they can help provide you with a gelatin-free product.

If you have any questions about taking your iron supplements, please speak to your GP, pharmacist or hospital doctor.

- <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/ferrous-fumarate/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/iron/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Dr R Sampson, RBFT Haematology, May 2026

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