



NHS

Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

High haemoglobin

Information for patients

You have been given this leaflet as a blood test has shown you have a high level of haemoglobin in your blood. This is sometimes called erythrocytosis or polycythaemia.

What is haemoglobin?

Haemoglobin is a protein that carries oxygen to all the tissues of your body. Your haemoglobin is also a measurement of the red cells in your blood.

What can cause high haemoglobin?

There are many reasons your haemoglobin may be high. Some simple reasons include dehydration or smoking. Other more specialist haematological conditions or other medical conditions can also cause a rise in haemoglobin.

What are the symptoms of high haemoglobin?

You may have no symptoms at all and it may just have been picked up in a blood test.

Some people experience symptoms such as headaches, skin reddening, blurred vision, dizziness, night sweats, weight loss, fatigue or itchiness.

What will happen now?

In order to understand why your haemoglobin is raised we will take some blood samples for analysis. Once these results are back you will have an appointment with a haematology doctor.

In the meantime, it is important to lower your haemoglobin to a normal level. This is done by a simple procedure called a venesection, in which a needle is inserted into a vein in your arm and 450mls (about $\frac{3}{4}$ pint) of blood is removed.

If you have ever been a blood donor, this procedure is just like giving blood (although your blood is disposed of safely as it cannot be reused).

Initially you may have this repeated once a week or fortnightly, until such a time your level is within the normal range.

Where will your venesection be done?

Venesections are done on our Battle Day Unit on level 2 in Battle Block.

If you need to contact them about your appointment their number is 0118 322 6980.

They are open Monday to Friday 8.30am-4.30pm.

Further reading

<https://labtestsonline.org.uk/tests/haemoglobin>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/erythrocytosis/>

<https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/leaflets/venesection>

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

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

RBFT Haematology, June 2026

Next review due: June 2028