



... ask your
doctor about
transfusion-related
iron overload



Mission:

Iron Disorders Institute (IDI) exists so that people with iron disorders receive an early, accurate diagnosis, appropriate treatment and are equipped to live healthy lives.

For more information about iron:

Books:

Guide to Hemochromatosis
Guide to Anemia
Exposing The Hidden Dangers of Iron
Cooking with Less Iron

Newsletter:

nanograms for patients

**At-a-Glance Desk Reference Charts
for Physicians:**

Hereditary Hemochromatosis
Iron Overload with Anemia

Web sites: www.irondisorders.org
www.hemochromatosis.org

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For more information about iron, visit our website
www.irondisorders.org

What Every
Transfusion Patient
Should Know about
Iron Overload
(too much iron in the body)



If you have had more than 8 blood transfusions...



About too much iron

Blood transfusions can be life-saving for people who do not have adequate red blood cells. Some people may need blood transfusions for a short time or for the rest of their life. While transfusions deliver vital red blood cells, what some patients may not realize is that each unit of blood contains 250 milligrams of iron. Generally, a person needs only 1 milligram of iron a day to replace what is lost from normal body function. Once iron gets into our system it is used or stored; when stored levels become too high, the excess iron begins to act like a poison.

The body has no efficient way to get rid of excess iron. With repeated blood transfusion, a person continues to build up iron. If unneeded iron is not removed, iron overload will result and organ damage can occur. The heart, liver, spleen, pancreas, and the endocrine system are most vulnerable to damage caused by iron overload.

Repeated Blood Transfusions:

After as few as 10 blood transfusions the signs and symptoms of iron overload can be seen in some people. It is important to be aware of this and discuss with your doctor a plan to lower excessive levels of iron as part of your therapy to achieve iron balance and adequate levels of red blood cells.

**Your doctor will advise you of
therapy choices for
iron reduction.**

Getting rid of too much iron

Iron reduction therapies:

Iron can only be removed with blood donation (phlebotomy) or with prescription medicines that are designed to specifically bind with and remove iron from the body.

Phlebotomy:

The same as blood donation, except a doctor's order is required. Your hemoglobin level must be adequate to tolerate this procedure.

Iron Chelation Therapy:

If your hemoglobin is low but your body iron high you will need special medicines to reduce iron levels. There are a number of iron chelators, but in the USA, there are two presently approved for use to lower excessive iron levels due to repeated transfusions. These drugs are: deferoxamine (deffer-OX-uh-meem) brand name Desferal® and deferasirox (deaf-ur-ES-ur-ox) brand name Exjade®. Your doctor will advise which iron reduction approach is best for you.

**Reduction
of excess iron levels
is important to your
health!**