

Your child's medication: Iron supplement for restless legs syndrome

Information for children, families and carers

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with a condition called restless legs syndrome and has been prescribed an iron supplement as part of their treatment programme. This factsheet explains how your child should take the iron supplement. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Iron supplement

An iron medication that can be used to improve symptoms of restless legs syndrome.

How does iron help to treat restless legs syndrome?

Restless legs syndrome has been linked to low iron stores in the blood. People with restless legs syndrome typically experience an unpleasant sensation in their legs, particularly in the evening or overnight, that is relieved by movement, and made worse when they are still.

Restless legs syndrome can sometimes make it more difficult to fall asleep, or go back to sleep if your child wakes up in the night.

We can help to treat restless legs syndrome with a combination of:

- gentle exercise
- massage of the legs in the evening
- an iron supplement and/or other medications
- avoiding caffeine in food and drinks

Iron supplements increase the iron stores in the body and can help to reduce the symptoms of restless legs.

How to take the iron supplement

Iron supplements come in different forms such as ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate, ferrous fumerate and ferrous feredetate. They are available as:

- tablets
- capsules
- liquid

We will help you choose the right product for your child.

Taking an iron supplement with vitamin C (such as a large glass of fresh orange juice) may help the body to absorb the medication.

Taking an iron supplement with milk or dairy products may prevent the absorption of iron.

Dose

It is important that you follow the instructions about how much your child should take. The dose will be shown on the medication label.

Storage

Keep your child's medication in a locked cupboard.

Other medications

Check with us before your child takes any new medication while they are taking the iron supplement. Check with your pharmacist before your child takes any over-the-counter medication.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

An iron supplement should only be taken during pregnancy if the benefits outweigh the risks.

Contact us for advice if your child:

- is pregnant
- thinks they may be pregnant
- is planning to have a baby
- is breastfeeding

Monitoring

Before your child starts taking the iron supplement, they will need to have a fasting blood test to check their ferritin (a blood protein that contains iron) levels.

After your child has taken the iron supplement for three months, they will need to have a fasting blood test to check their ferritin levels again. Please take your child for the blood test two to seven days after finishing the course of iron.

Before each of your child's fasting blood tests:

- Your child should avoid iron-rich foods the night before the blood test.
- If your child is unwell, please delay the blood test until they have fully recovered.

Blood tests will be done in the butterfly room in Children's outpatients on C level at Southampton Children's Hospital. Please arrive just before 8.30am (Monday to Friday) for your child's fasting blood test. If the blood test has been requested by someone within the Southampton sleep team, you do not need to book an appointment. The blood test request will be sent electronically, so you will not need to take a blood test request form with you.

What if my child takes too much iron?

It can be dangerous to take too much iron, because it can cause toxicity.

If your child takes too much iron, contact us or call NHS 111 for advice and have the medication or packaging to hand. In an emergency, take your child to your nearest emergency department. Make sure to take your child's medication container and packaging in with you, even if it is empty. This will help the healthcare professional caring for your child.

What if my child misses a dose of iron?

You can give your child their missed dose as soon as you remember.

What if my child is sick (vomits) after taking a dose of iron?

Do not repeat the first dose. This is because it can be difficult to know how much was absorbed.

Side effects

As with all medications, there may be side effects with taking an iron supplement.

Common side effects

- Constipation - Encourage your child to drink plenty of water throughout the day, and eat foods that are rich in fibre.
- Smaller appetite - To help with this, offer your child smaller portions.
- Discoloured stools (poo) - This is nothing to be concerned about.

These side effects will usually disappear with time as your child's body adjusts to the new medication. If the side effects do not reduce within a few weeks, or you have concerns about your child, please contact us, your general practitioner (GP) or local pharmacist for advice. **Reducing your child's dose of iron for a week or two may help to reduce these side effects.**

For a full list of the possible side effects, please see the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with your child's medication.

General advice for medication

- Try to give your child their medication at about the same time(s) each day to help you remember.
- Never give your child's medication to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could be dangerous.
- **If you think that someone else has taken your child's medication by accident, contact the person's GP or NHS 111 immediately, or take them to the nearest emergency department if they are unwell.**
- If you think the medication is not working, contact us but continue to give the medication as usual. Do not give any extra doses as this may be dangerous.
- Make sure that your child always has enough medication. Order a new prescription at least two weeks before they will run out.
- Make sure the medication your child has at home has not reached the 'best before' or 'use by' date on the packaging. Give old medication to your local pharmacy to dispose of.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Sleep clinic

Telephone: **023 8120 5922** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Email: paedssleepadmin@uhs.nhs.uk

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/restless-legs-syndrome

www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/iron

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport

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