



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program
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Q: If I take EPO and iron pills, do I still need intravenous iron?

A: Most people on dialysis have too few blood cells. This condition is called anemia. To make more red blood cells, your body needs two things:

- The hormone *erythropoietin* (EPO), which tells your bone marrow to make more red blood cells.
- Iron, a building block your body uses to make new red blood cells.

Sources of iron: You can get some iron by eating iron-rich foods, like liver. But your body doesn't absorb much iron from food. Nearly all of the iron your body uses comes from breaking down old red blood cells. Since you don't have enough red blood cells, your body can't get the iron it needs.

Prescription iron drugs: If you need iron, your doctor will prescribe it. You may be able to take iron in pill or liquid form. However, your body may not absorb enough iron by mouth, and iron pills can cause stomach pain or constipation. Most people on dialysis get iron through an IV line, either during treatment, or at a clinic visit if they use peritoneal dialysis or home hemodialysis.

What *I* can do to stay healthy:

- Learn what my blood iron levels should be and what can be done if they are too high or low.
- Track my blood iron levels and any symptoms over time.
- Ask my dietitian about iron-rich foods I can eat.
- Use cast-iron pots for cooking, to increase iron in my food.
- Take my iron pills or liquid as prescribed.
- Tell my doctor or nurse if my oral iron upsets my stomach.
- Get every dose of IV iron that my doctor prescribes for me.
- Get *Just the Facts: Anemia* from Life Options at (800) 468-7777 or www.lifeoptions.org.
- Visit module 6 of Kidney School™: *Anemia and Kidney Disease* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about anemia.