



Iron (Ferrous Sulphate) Medication

Whānau/Family Information – Neonatal Services

What is iron for?

Iron is vital for the body to function and is particularly important for brain development and in making new red blood cells to prevent anaemia.

In the last few months of pregnancy the pēpi/baby stores iron in their body to be used after they are born. Delayed cord clamping at your pēpi delivery also improves iron stores. At birth, well-grown full-term pēpi have stored enough iron for their needs until 6 months of age.

Why do some pēpi need to take extra iron?

Pēpi who are born early (less than 37 weeks) or who are small (less than 2.5 kg at birth) do not have as much iron stored in their body. In addition, what is there is used up when the pēpi grows after birth and so they need extra iron to be given to prevent iron deficiency.

What dose of iron is needed?

The iron dose is worked out using the weight of the pēpi and is 0.5 mL per kg per day. The dose can be increased by your family doctor with each new prescription as the pēpi gains weight. We find that pēpi do not like to take more than 2 mL and so that is the highest dose we recommend for most pēpi.

How long does my pēpi need iron?

We recommend that iron is started from 4 weeks of age and continued until the pēpi first birthday. Iron may need to start in hospital or after discharge home depending on how preterm your pēpi was.

What if my pēpi changes from breastmilk to formula?

If your pēpi changes from breastmilk to formula milk then the iron liquid can be stopped. This is because the formula has extra iron in it already. If your pēpi is having a mixture of breastmilk and formula they usually get enough iron from the formula if at least half of the feeds are from formula.

How do I give iron to my pēpi?

It is usually given once a day with a syringe or by a medicine teat. It is better absorbed on an empty stomach so giving before a feed is advised. If your pēpi is also on Gaviscon the iron should be given 2 hours before or after a Gaviscon dose to aid absorption. Iron syrup will stain clothes – use an old bib to prevent spillage onto clothing. When children are older some parents give the dose while bathing the infant to avoid spillage onto clothing.

How will the iron affect my pēpi?

Pēpi react to the taste but this does not mean it is a problem. The bowel motions may become a darker colour but this is harmless. The bowel motions can become a little firmer and some pēpi are constipated when they first commence on iron, but this usually settles.

Where should I store the iron?

Keep the medication in the container it came in and out of reach of children. It can be stored at room temperature but it is best not to be in the bathroom where it can get too hot.

The syrup is normally colourless, but if the colour varies from bluish green to gold this is fine.