Chronic Iron Overload

About chronic iron overload

Chronic iron overload occurs when the body’s limited iron storage capacities are exceeded. Because there is no natural mechanism to remove excess iron from the body, iron builds up – first in the liver, then in hormonal organs like the thyroid and pituitary glands, and eventually in the heart.

The major cause of chronic iron overload is regular blood transfusions, which can be required for managing many chronic health conditions, such as sickle cell disease, thalassemia (including non-transfusion-dependent thalassemias, or NTDT) and myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS).

A serum ferritin test is a blood test that measures the amount of iron in your blood. If you have had 10 or more transfusions in your lifetime, ask your doctor about a serum ferritin test. If your serum ferritin is more than 1,000 mcg/L, you may have chronic iron overload. Discuss treatment with your doctor to determine which one is best for you.

Treating chronic iron overload

If you have chronic iron overload, you may need treatment for as long as you receive transfusions. Iron chelation drug therapy has been shown to benefit patients who have transfusion-dependent anemias.

The goals of iron chelation therapy are to remove the amount of iron administered in transfusions and to prevent the accumulation of iron reaching harmful levels. Chelation therapy helps eliminate iron from the body, primarily through the feces. Some studies show that patients experiencing iron overload who receive chelation therapy have a significantly greater life expectancy than those who do not.

Questions to ask your doctor

- Does my current transfusion regimen put me at risk for chronic iron overload?
- Do my serum ferritin levels indicate signs of chronic iron overload?
- Is iron chelation a possible treatment option for me?
- Aside from treatment, are there measures I can take in my daily life to help reduce my iron levels?
- What resources are available to support patients with chronic iron overload?
Additional resources

Infographics
- Iron Overload Infographic
- NTDT Complications Infographic

Backgrounders
- Chronic Iron Overload Backgrounder
- Sickle Cell Disease Backgrounder
- Thalassemia & Iron Overload Backgrounder
- MDS Backgrounder

Videos

What is sickle cell disease

Video of What is Sickle Cell Disease?

What is sickle cell disease [1]

Blood Transfusions in Sickle Cell Disease [2]

Iron Overload in Sickle Cell Disease [3]

Source URL: https://www.novartis.com/our-focus/cancer/oncology-disease-areas/chronic-iron-overload

Links