

Erythropoietin (EPO)



UHN

Information for Patients

Perioperative Blood Conservation Program

What is Erythropoietin (EPO)?

Erythropoietin (EPO) injections stimulate the production of Red Blood Cells. EPO helps your bone marrow make and increase your red blood cells. Increasing your red blood cell count can reduce your need for a blood transfusion.

Who receives EPO?

- When your red blood count is low you feel tired, weak and lack energy. This is called anemia.
- Patients with illnesses that lower their red blood cells, such as kidney disease or cancer, are given EPO.
- EPO is given to patients who are undergoing major surgery who often lose red blood cells through bleeding and may require a blood transfusion. EPO can help reduce the need for blood transfusion.
- EPO is also given to patients who have decided to donate their own blood for their own surgery. The doctor prescribes EPO to help them increase their blood cell count so that they can donate the amount of blood they may need during or after surgery.

It is important to recognize that EPO is not necessarily the best choice for all patients. Every treatment has risks including EPO. These risks will be explained to you by the Perioperative Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator during your preadmission appointment.

How is Erythropoietin (EPO) given?

- EPO is given by injection (a needle in your arm) as prescribed by your doctor.
- If you are undergoing surgery, you will normally receive three of these injections (once a week for 3 weeks). The first needle will be given about 3 weeks before the surgery and then weekly until your surgery.

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Author: Lucia Evans & Bruna Curti

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University Health Network
Toronto General Hospital Toronto Western Hospital Princess Margaret Hospital

- You will receive your first dose of EPO from the Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator during your preadmission appointment.
- You will then need to make appointments with your family doctor to receive your 2nd and 3rd doses if needed.

(The Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator will discuss these appointments with you).

What dose of EPO will I be given?

Your doctor will decide on the dose based on how much you weigh.

Will I have any side effects from taking EPO?

Most patients do not have side effects from EPO. But some patients do. Everyone reacts to medicine in different ways. The following are normal side effects. If they do not go away, call The Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator or your family doctor.

The common side effects are:

- Flu-like symptoms (dizziness, drowsiness, fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and weakness).
- Redness, burning and pain where you got the needle.
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- High blood pressure. Sometimes when your red blood cell count goes up it causes your blood pressure to increase. Prior to each injection of EPO your blood pressure will be taken.

If you have any questions or concerns please call the Perioperative Blood Conservation Nurse Coordinator at (416) 603-5164

For more information visit our Web site at
www.uhn.ca

If you would like to support the efforts of the Perioperative Blood Conservation Program please contact the Toronto General and Western Hospital Foundation @ 416-340-3935. Direct your support to the Blood Utilization Resuscitation Program (BURP).