

Epoetin

(sounds like 'EE-po-EE-tin')

Epoetin alfa or beta is used to treat anaemia (low numbers of red blood cells). Epoetin is also called EPO, Binocrit®, Eprex® or NeoRecormon®.

What is epoetin?

Epoetin is a man-made version of erythropoietin which is produced naturally in the body by the kidneys. Erythropoietin travels to your bone marrow to make red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body.

What is epoetin used to treat?

Epoetin is used to treat anaemia (low red blood cells) caused by severe kidney disease or cancer treatments. If you are unable to make enough erythropoietin, this causes anaemia. Epoetin acts like your erythropoietin to stimulate red blood cell production.

Dose of epoetin

The dose is different for different people, and it depends on what it's being used for. How long you need it for depends on how well your treatment is working.

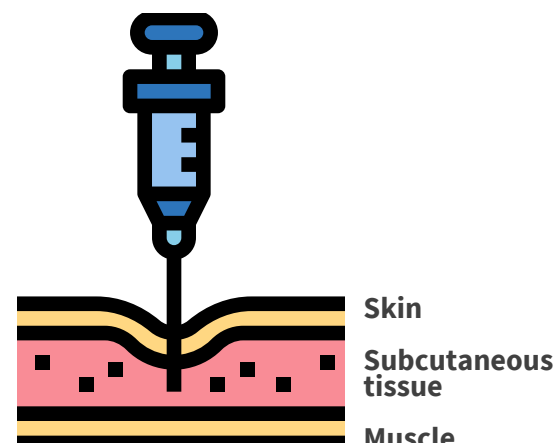
Your doctor will check your haemoglobin to see how many red blood cells you have. This will help work out the best dose. Epoetin is an injection usually given 1-3 times a week.

You may not notice the effects straight away; it may take 2 weeks to 3 months to feel better. Keep using epoetin unless your doctor tells you to stop. Speak to your doctor or nurse before stopping.

How is epoetin given

Epoetin is an injection given just under your skin (subcutaneous injection). Some people can give this themselves; some may need it given by another person after training, eg, a family/whānau member or friend, your doctor or nurse. If you are unsure, ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist to show you.

Note: If you are having haemodialysis, epoetin may be given afterwards.



Preparation

Store epoetin in the fridge. Take it out of the fridge 15-30 minutes before you use it, or gently warm it in the palms of your hands for about 1 minute. Don't warm it in the microwave or in hot water.

Injection site

Choose the front of your thighs or your abdomen (belly) at least 5 cm from your belly button. The injection site should change to prevent bruising or skin thickening.

Do not inject into a red or swollen area. Do not put the needle in too deep; this will inject it into your muscle, it only needs to go under the skin.

Missed doses

If you miss a dose, inject it as soon as you remember. If you are within a day of your next injection, forget the missed one and carry on with your normal schedule. Do not double up the injections to make up for a forgotten dose.

What are the side effects of epoetin?

Epoetin can cause side effects, although not everyone gets them.

Common side effects

These are usually mild and go away with time. Talk to your healthcare team if these side effects cause you problems or don't go away:

- bruising, redness, pain or tenderness at the injection site
- indigestion, tummy upset, feeling sick (nausea)
- mild headache.

Iron supplements

You will need enough iron in your body for epoetin to work well. Keep a well-balanced diet, including foods with iron, such as meats, green vegetables, cereals and eggs. If you have received advice from a dietician, follow this. Some people may need to take iron supplements.

Syringe disposal

Avoid recapping the syringe to prevent needle stick injuries. Dispose of syringes in a sharps bin. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about sharp bins.



Rare, serious side effects

Contact your healthcare team or Healthline 0800 611 116 immediately if you notice these symptoms or side effects and tell them you are taking epoetin:

- pain, redness or swelling in a leg or arm
- problems breathing or short of breath
- chest pain
- severe headache
- feeling drowsy or confused
- problems with your eyesight
- having fits (seizures)
- being sick (vomiting).

For more information about epoetin visit hn.org.nz/epoetin