

# Having a venesection

## Information for patients

This leaflet answers common questions about having a venesection. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

In all cases, a doctor will explain the venesection to you and answer any questions you may have.

In most cases it will be possible for a friend or relative to accompany you for all or part of the procedure. Please ask your nurse or doctor.

### What is a venesection?

A venesection is the term used for removing a volume of blood, in much the same way a donor donates a pint of blood, as a form of treatment.

The procedure is used to reduce iron levels in patients with the condition haemochromatosis. It is also used to treat patients with unusually high levels of haemoglobin (the oxygen-carrying protein in your blood).

When the number of red cells in the blood is increased, the blood flow around your body can become sluggish. As a result, this can increase the chance of developing problems such as a thrombosis (blood clot). Removing the extra cells reduces this risk.

### Before your venesection

Before carrying out any procedure, we must seek your consent. We will explain the procedure to you, along with the associated risks, benefits and alternatives before we ask you for your consent. If you have any questions or any concerns, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

Please tell us if you are taking any medicine to control your blood pressure – we may ask you to stop taking them on the day of your visit. Your doctor or nurse will advise you of this.

No special preparation is needed prior to this procedure. Please have your breakfast as usual. You do not need to bring anything in particular with you, and there is no reason why you should not drive or continue with normal activities before and after the procedure.

However, as with any hospital visit you may feel anxious – for this reason you are welcome to bring someone with you to keep you company.

Remember to bring enough money to cover the cost of parking and refreshments. Beverages and light snacks are available for patients only, and there is also a cafe, restaurant and shop within the hospital.

### **How is a venesection done and what will happen on the day?**

Before the venesection is carried out, the procedure will be explained to you by your doctor during your out-patient clinic appointment and by your specialist nurse on the day. Please ask any questions you may have – we are happy to answer them.

On arrival to the hospital, please make your way to the reception desk on 2 North A. If you have an appointment letter/card, please hand this to the receptionist. Your procedure should take no longer than one hour.

You will be offered a drink before the treatment and asked to sit in a chair. A tourniquet (tight bandage) is applied to your arm in the same way as if you were having a blood sample taken. The needle, which is already fixed to the blood collection bag, is inserted into your vein. This is left in position throughout the collection, fixed in place with tape.

### **After your venesection**

The blood collection takes about 15 minutes. When it is completed the needle is removed, pressure is applied for a few minutes to the area and a small dressing is put on. You will be offered another drink and asked to remain seated for a further 20 minutes.

### **Risks and side-effects**

When the needle is inserted it will feel uncomfortable for a few seconds. When the needle is removed it may bleed a little at the puncture site. Pressure will be applied by holding the site firmly for a few minutes. If you are taking tablets that thin the blood, for example warfarin, pressure will be applied for at least 10 minutes. We may ask you to stay a little longer to check there is no bleeding once pressure has been removed. There may also be some bruising which will take some days to disappear and as with any bruise, may be slightly uncomfortable or sore. If bruising has occurred this may be uncomfortable and we ask that you contact us for advice.

Immediately after the removal of the blood you may feel a little dizzy; this is not unusual and can be minimised by resting (staying seated) before you leave the department and having another drink. It is advisable to rest for a few hours following the procedure.

Having a venesection is a very safe, simple and quick treatment for the removal of excess of iron or red blood cells.

Most people carry on as normal after they have left the department. Some people however, do feel a little washed out for a couple of days after. There are unlikely to be any other side-effects.

### **Alternatives to a venesection**

For people who have severe difficulty or other medical problems giving blood, there are alternatives to this procedure:

#### **Haemochromatosis**

Chelation therapy is normally used to treat excess iron caused by multiple blood transfusions. However, this treatment is less effective than a venesection and must be given by continuous infusion over a long period of time, which can be an unpleasant experience for the patient. This treatment is only offered in exceptional circumstances. Please ask your nurse or doctor if you have any questions regarding this. Oral iron chelators are being developed, though venesection remains more effective and is therefore the preferred treatment for haemochromatosis.

#### **Polycythemia vera**

Oral myelosuppressive drugs such as hydroxycarbamide may be used if venesection is not effective. This is a form of chemotherapy that is sometimes used to treat this condition.

## Do you have any further questions?

If you are worried or concerned following the procedure, or if you would like any further advice or information, please do not hesitate to ask – we are more than happy to help.

- Infusion suite at Finchley Memorial Hospital  
Tel: 020 3758 2379  
Email: [rf.fmhinfusionsuite@nhs.net](mailto:rf.fmhinfusionsuite@nhs.net)
- Mark Smith, clinical nurse specialist for haematology  
Tel: 020 7794 0500 ext 31122 or bleep 4214
- Moni Abiodun, haematology lead nurse  
Tel: 020 7794 0500 ext 35981 or bleep 2413
- Lynda Greenslade, clinical nurse specialist for hepatology  
Tel: 020 7794 0500 ext 34003 or bleep 2394

For more information about the haematology service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website at:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/haematology](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/haematology)

## Cancelling or changing your appointment

If you think that you may be late, or if you cannot attend or need to change your appointment, please let us know in advance by contacting the haematology/oncology day unit (2 North A) on 020 7830 2273.

If you have any feedback on this leaflet, please email:

[rf.communciations@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communciations@nhs.net)

**This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please ask a member of staff.**

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