

PATIENT INFORMATION: Iron Overload

What is iron overload and why is it a problem?

Blood transfusions are an important part of treatment for many patients who have sickle cell disease. But blood transfusions contain extra iron that the body doesn't need. The body has no natural way to remove this iron. The build-up of iron can cause iron overload.

Iron overload may cause damage to many parts of the body, including:

- Heart
- Liver
- Pancreas
- Pituitary gland
- Thyroid gland

Specifically, iron overload can cause health problems such as:

- Irregular heartbeat, heart attack
- Swelling of the liver and liver damage
- Diabetes
- Sexual development and infertility problems
- Growth problems

Iron overload is a "silent" condition. In other words, you may not notice any symptoms even if your iron levels become high. If left untreated, iron overload may put your life at risk.

Iron overload can be treated with medication. A blood test called a ferritin level can measure how much iron is in your blood. If your ferritin level is more than 1000 mcg/L, you may have iron overload. We can also use MRI (imaging test) to check for iron in the heart and liver.

Rainbow Sickle Cell Anemia Center

If your child has signs or symptoms of illness, please call 216-844-3345 and follow the prompts.

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Have a question? Ask a Rainbow doctor. **216-UH4-KIDS** | **216-844-5437** | Rainbow.org/AngiesInstitute

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