

Erythropoiesis- stimulating Agent (ESA) Therapy and Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

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What are erythropoiesis-stimulating agents?

- Erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (ESAs) are a group of medicines that help take the place of a hormone called erythropoietin (EPO).
- EPO is a hormone released by the kidneys to tell your bone marrow to make more red blood cells.
- When you don't have enough EPO coming from your kidneys, your body doesn't make enough red blood cells.
- Red blood cells are very important because they carry oxygen to all of the tissues in your body.
- When you don't have enough red blood cells, your body may not get enough oxygen. You may feel tired, weak or short of breath.
- Darbepoetin-alfa (Aranesp®) and erythropoietin-alfa (Eprex®) are ESAs that are injected into your body.

Why does someone with CKD need this medicine?

- People with CKD may not have enough EPO coming from their kidneys to tell their body to make more red blood cells.
- This causes their red blood cell count to drop and anemia (not enough red blood cells or hemoglobin in the blood) to develop.
- In order for ESAs to work, you may need to take iron.
- Iron is needed to make the oxygen-carrying part (hemoglobin) of your red blood cells.

How do I take this medicine?

- Your health care team will do blood work to measure your hemoglobin levels. This will help them to figure out how much ESA you need and how often you need to take it.
- Both Aranesp® and Eprex® can be given intravenously (through an IV in your vein) or subcutaneously (injected under the skin).

Are there any side effects?

Some common side effects are:

- › changes in blood pressure
- › muscle pain
- › headache
- › diarrhea
- › irritation at injection site (if given subcutaneously)

**What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

Looking for more health information?

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.