

Erythropoiesis-stimulating Agents (ESAs) for Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD): With Active Cancer or a History of Cancer or Stroke

This pamphlet will explain the risks and benefits of erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA) medications (like Aranesp[®] and Eprex[®]). These medications may be ordered for people with chronic kidney disease (CKD) to help take the place of a hormone called erythropoietin (EPO).

- EPO is released by your kidneys to tell your bone marrow to make more red blood cells. When your kidneys do not release enough EPO, your body cannot make enough red blood cells.
- Not having enough red blood cells is called anemia. Anemia can make you feel tired, weak, or short of breath.

If you have CKD and active cancer or a history of cancer or stroke, it is important to carefully consider the risks and benefits of ESAs.

Risks

- › Possible higher risk of cancer, stroke, or death

Benefits

- › Improved symptoms of anemia
- › Prevents the need for a blood transfusion. **This is important**, because blood transfusions can cause serious reactions or death.

If you have active cancer or a history of cancer or stroke, your health care team (doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, and pharmacists) will work with you to decide whether ESAs are right for you.

Your health care team will talk with you about:

- › Your tumour type and stage
- › Your stroke history
- › How bad your anemia is
- › Your life expectancy (how long you are expected to live)
- › Risks of blood transfusion
- › Risk of your tumour growing or coming back

- They may recommend lower doses of an ESA and target a lower hemoglobin (main part of a red blood cell which carries oxygen throughout the body).
- If you were recently diagnosed with cancer or had a stroke, they may stop your ESAs.
- After talking with your health care team about ESAs, it is up to you to decide if you will take them. You will need to provide informed consent (verbal or written).
- Your health care team will monitor and assess you regularly to make sure the ESAs are helping without causing any unwanted results (such as serious side effects or the return of your cancer).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact a member of your health care team.

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

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

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

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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