



Patient & Family Guide  
2020

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



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

## 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 epoetin 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 a blood test 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<sup>®</sup> and Eprex<sup>®</sup> 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 (loose, watery poop)
- › Irritation at the injection site (if given by a needle under the skin)

# How do I store this medicine?

- ESA must be stored between 2° C and 8° C (35.6° F and 46.4° F). **You must keep your ESA at this temperature until you use it.**
- **Do not freeze ESA.**
- If you are travelling, you must keep your ESA in an insulated container with an ice pack. Put it in a fridge as soon as possible.
- Do not use your ESA if it has been at room temperature for more than 24 hours (1 day).
- If your ESA has been exposed to a temperature up to 30° C (86° F), even once, contact the Kidney Program for instructions.
- Store your ESA out of children's reach.

## Looking for more health information?

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

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>

*Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

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