

## Heart Conditions

If you are on blood pressure medication or have a heart condition please inform your Haematologist and the treating nurse. You may require extra fluid during the procedure.

Please contact the Haematology Unit or the On-Call Haematologist via Switch immediately if any of the following occur after your procedure:-

- Bleeding or swelling in the area around the needle insertion site
- Fever
- Discharge at the site of needle insertion
- Pain at the site of needle insertion or surrounding area.

If bleeding occurs at the site apply pressure and if it does not cease, please phone the Haematology Unit during operating hours, or go to the Emergency Department after hours.

**During Business Hours Contact Haematology Unit: 02 61748456**

**After Hours Contact the On-Call Haematologist via Switch: 02 62442222**

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Publication No XXXXX

# Patient Information: Today you are having a venesection

Division of Cancer, Ambulatory and  
Community Health Support



*This pamphlet has been written to explain what a venesection is and identify the risks and benefits of treatment.*

## What is a Venesection?

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A venesection is the removal of blood to reduce the number of red blood cells circulating in the body and/or the removal of excess iron from your body, depending on your medical condition.

During a venesection, approximately 450ml of blood is removed in the same manner a blood donation is collected. This amount can vary depending on many factors that your doctor or treating nurse will discuss with you. How often a venesection is performed depends on your blood result and your Haematologist. This is why it is important to have a regular blood test.

Venesections are used to treat:-

**Haemochromatosis:** Where too much iron is absorbed into the body. Once iron is absorbed into the body it is unable to be excreted. Iron deposits can occur in organs resulting in disease. By removing blood, the level of iron in the blood is reduced and damage to the organs is minimised.

**Polycythemia:** Where the body produces too many red blood cells. When the number of red blood cells increases above normal levels the blood thickens and becomes sluggish increasing the risk for clots to develop. Blood clots can be life threatening if not treated appropriately. Venesections reduce the number of circulating red blood cells.

## How is a Venesection Done?

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Venesections are carried out in the Haematology Unit situated on level 4 of the Cancer Centre at Canberra Hospital.

A venesection is very similar to a blood donation. A tourniquet is placed around your arm and a needle is inserted into a vein within the elbow region. This

needle is attached to a tube and bag that can hold approximately 450ml of blood. Once the blood is flowing the tourniquet will be loosened slightly. This should take about fifteen minutes.

When the venesection is complete the needle will be removed and a piece of gauze placed on the puncture site. You will be asked to press on this for a few minutes. A band-aid will be placed onto the needle site and a bandage wrapped around your arm to prevent any further bleeding and reduce bruising. You will be given a drink of water and asked to stay in the unit for fifteen minutes before you go home.

## On The Day of your Appointment

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When you arrive on level 4 of the Cancer Centre please check in at the reception. If you have a letter/ appointment card please remember to bring it with you along with your Medicare card. The procedure should take no longer than an hour.

We recommend that you eat normally and drink extra fluids prior to your appointment.

Please advise your nurse if any of the following apply to you:-

- You are taking Anticoagulation medication
- You are taking blood pressure medication (beta-blockers)
- You have a heart condition
- You have fainted or felt unwell after blood tests or previous venesections
- You weigh less than 50kg
- You are frightened of needles

## Possible side effects include:

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*(Venesections are a relatively safe procedure)*

### Fainting and Tiredness

Immediately after the procedure you may feel dizzy and light headed. If this occurs during or after the procedure we will give you extra fluid and lay you down. You should feel better within a few minutes.

To minimize the risk of feeling faint, always eat normally and keep well hydrated prior to the procedure

You may feel tired following a venesection for a day or two. Avoid excessive exercise until the next day

Avoid smoking for 2 hours after a venesection

### Bruising or Bleeding

On occasion bruising or bleeding may occur at the needle entry site. Keep the bandage that the nurse applies after the venesection in place for at least 2 to 4 hours to reduce bruising at the site. Avoid lifting anything heavy with the venesected arm for the rest of the day.

### Pain

Venesections are not painful, but can be uncomfortable during needle insertion. We will offer you some numbing medicine prior to needle insertion.

### Nerve Damage

It is possible, although rare to damage structures near the vein we are entering during a venesection. If a nerve is hit during the procedure it will be very painful, and you may feel pins and needles down your arm and into your hand. If you have any sensation or pain during the procedure it is important that you inform your treating nurse immediately.