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Venesection: Patient Information

What is a venesection and why do I need it?

Venesection (Phlebotomy) is a minor procedure where blood is drawn out from your vein for the purpose of blood donation or treatment of a variety of blood disorders.

Venesection is often used as part of treatment of Haemochromatosis where the purpose is to remove iron from a patient who has significant iron overload (high ferritin levels due to an inherited disorder of iron metabolism)

Venesection is also used to treat disorders where the patient's body is making too many red blood cells. The purpose here is to remove some blood cells to improve the 'thickness' of the patient's blood. An example of this type of disorder is Polycythemia.

What happens when I arrive?

When you arrive, a nurse will explain the procedure to you and ask you a few questions regarding your medical history. Occasionally some people feel faint during this procedure. Please let the nurse know if you have a history of fainting, low blood pressure or problems with your heart rhythm. Let the nurse know if you have any allergies (including to tapes or sticking plasters), and for women, if you could be pregnant.

The nurse will take your blood pressure, pulse and temperature.

The nurse will use a needle to insert a cannula into your vein. The cannula is secured into position with tape. A blood taking bag is attached to the cannula via some flexible plastic tubing.

Does it hurt?

Some patients experience a degree of discomfort with the needle being placed in the vein but this is very brief (1-2 seconds). Once the needle is in place there should be no pain.

How long does it take?

Venesection usually takes 15 minutes to drain 450 mls of blood. Your doctor may order fluids to be given over 1-2 hours via another cannula inserted into your opposite arm. During your procedure you will be given refreshments to help prevent dehydration.



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What happens after the venesection?

The cannula will be removed, the puncture site checked, and a small dressing applied. The nurse will then check blood pressure and observations again. When your blood pressure is stable and the puncture site is clean, you can be discharged. After leaving you should observe your venesection site for bleeding and signs of infection.

What does venesection feel like?

Some people feel dizzy immediately after the procedure. Be aware of this, and minimise it by resting and drinking plenty of fluids.

You may feel a little lethargic for a couple of days.

You can resume all your normal activities after the procedure but avoid strenuous exercise for a day or two afterwards.

Keep hydrated and drink two litres of fluid daily for 48 to 72 hours following your procedure.

How often do I need venesection?

How often you need venesections is different for everyone. It depends on your condition, and on your blood tests. Some people may initially need up to weekly venesections, but this usually drops to far less frequent when their blood levels are under control.

What if I have problems after my venesection?

Please immediately contact your doctor or come to your local Emergency Department if you experience any of the following occur after your procedure:

- bleeding
- fever
- redness at venesection site
- smelly discharge from your venesection site
- you feel insignificantly unwell in any way.

In the unlikely event that you become extremely unwell after the procedure, dial 000 and ask for an ambulance.