

Supplying over the counter treatments in pregnancy and breastfeeding – anaemia

If a pregnant or breastfeeding patient presents in your pharmacy, seeking treatment for iron deficiency anaemia, there are products that you can sell/supply within their marketing authorisations (product licences).

Several iron supplements have a 'Pharmacy' (P) legal status and if recommended by a healthcare professional, ferrous sulphate, ferrous fumarate or ferrous gluconate, are suitable for prophylaxis or treatment of iron deficiency anaemia in pregnancy and can be supplied to pregnant people.

The following products are examples of suitable products:

Name of product	Legal category	Name of product	Legal category
Ferrous Sulfate 200mg Coated Tablets (generic)	P	Ferrous fumarate 305mg capsules (Galfer®)	P
Ferrous gluconate 300mg tablets	P	Ferrous fumarate 140mg/5ml syrup (generic or Galfer®)	P
Ferrous fumarate 210mg tablets	P	Ferrous fumarate 322mg tablets	P

Breastfeeding

Some of the above products may also be suitable for people who are breastfeeding – e.g. the summary of product characteristics for Galfer® says: "No adverse effects of ferrous fumarate have been shown in breastfed infants of treated mothers. Ferrous fumarate can be used during breast-feeding if clinically indicated."

Dosage

NICE [Clinical Knowledge summaries](#) state:

'Iron deficiency anaemia should be treated with one tablet once daily of oral ferrous sulfate, ferrous fumarate, or ferrous gluconate and continued for 3 months after the iron deficiency is corrected.'

This aligns with the recommendations in the BNF, which say:

"An initial once-daily dose regimen of oral iron salts is recommended, as this may be just as effective as multiple daily dose regimens (such as two or three times a day dosing), with a lower incidence of side-effects and better compliance."

Once daily dosing should be recommended for treatment or prophylaxis unless the patient has been advised differently by their doctor or midwife.

Counselling points:

- Ensure appropriate safety netting advice has been provided to all patients to ensure that they seek further help from a healthcare professional if symptoms worsen or don't resolve.
- Ensure the patient is counselled to avoid taking iron supplements with tea, eggs or milk as it will reduce absorption.
- If the patient experiences gastrointestinal adverse effects, discomfort may be minimized by taking the iron supplement with or after food.

Additional information about choice of product

There may be other suitable ferrous sulphate products. If you are unsure if a product is suitable for supply to a pregnant patient, refer to the product information via:

- the electronic medicines compendium: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc>; or
- the [MHRA products website](#); or
- the patient information leaflet (PIL).

References

Individual product summaries of product characteristics on the electronic medicines compendium: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc>

MHRA products website: <https://products.mhra.gov.uk/> (lists summaries of product characteristics not on the electronic medicines compendium).

NHS Dictionary of medicines and Devices (DM&D): <https://dmd-browser.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/>

NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries – [Anaemia - iron deficiency](#)