Iron-ing Out the Wrinkles in Anemia Management

Clinical Question: Are newer oral iron formulations (iron polysaccharide complex or heme iron polypeptide) better than ferrous salts for iron deficiency anemia (IDA)?

Bottom Line: Newer iron formulations appear inferior to older ferrous salts. Ferrous salts improve hemoglobin up to 10-20g/L more and perhaps one in five more attaining IDA resolution at 3 months. Evidence that newer formulations have less adverse effects is inconsistent.

Evidence:
- Randomized controlled trials. Differences statistically significant unless indicated.
  - General population adults:
    ▪ 80 patients (92% female, mean age 39):¹ iron polysaccharide (Niferex™) versus ferrous fumarate, both ~150mg/day elemental iron. After 12 weeks:
      ▪ Ferrous fumarate improved hemoglobin (28.4g/L) more than iron polysaccharide (6g/L), and had better serum ferritin, mean corpuscular volume, and transferrin saturation but more nausea (31% versus 3%).
    ▪ 80 children (mean age 23 months):² Iron polysaccharide (NovaFerrum™) versus ferrous sulfate, both 3mg/kg/day elemental iron.
      ▪ At 12 weeks, ferrous sulphate improved hemoglobin more (10g/L), resolved IDA (29% vs 6%, Number Needed to Treat=5), caused less diarrhea (35% versus 58%).
    ▪ Smaller trials of adults (n=43)³ and premature infants (n=32)⁴: iron polysaccharide and ferrous salts were no different in hemoglobin improvement after 4-6 weeks.
  - Subgroups:
    ▪ Dialysis patients: At 6 months, ferrous salts no different from newer formulations on transferrin saturation⁵, ⁶ or proportion of iron-replete patients.⁵
      ▪ Ferritin ~(160µg/L) better with ferrous sulfate than heme iron (Proferrin ES™).⁵
Post-gastric bypass (n=14): Ferrous sulfate improved hemoglobin after 8 weeks, but heme iron (Proferrin ES™) did not.

Blood Donors (n=97): and pregnant patients (n=90): Heme iron with ferrous fumarate (Hemofer™) no different from higher doses ferrous fumarate alone in achieving anemia outcomes; ferrous fumarate alone caused more constipation (35% versus 14%).

**Context:**
- Multiple limitations including underpowered, multiple outcomes, non-intention-to-treat.
- Approximate costs/month for 100mg elemental iron/day: ferrous fumarate/sulphate (generics $5-10), ferrous fumarate (Palafer™ $35), iron polysaccharide complexes (Feramax™ $35).
- To reduce iron-related gastrointestinal upset: lower dose; use another ferrous salt (incidence of adverse effects: ferrous gluconate 30%, sulfate 32%, fumarate 47%); alternate day dosing.

**Authors:**
Samantha Moe PharmD, G Michael Allan MD CCFP

**Disclosures:**
Authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare

**References:**

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