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**An HIV Information Site & HIV Educational Resource Site (HIS & HERS)**

## erythropoietin - Procrit

### General Information

Erythropoietin is a hormone that is used to stimulate an increase in red blood cells.

### Specifics

Erythropoietin is a well-respected and very effective medication. It has a long track record of effectiveness and safety.

Erythropoietin works by stimulating your bones to produce more red blood cells. Red blood cells are produced in the marrow or center of the long bones on your body. Low red blood cells can produce symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath with exercise, and a fast heart rate. Usually iron tablets are given with erythropoietin because new red blood cells require extra iron.

### Dosing

Erythropoietin is available only as an injection that is given just under the surface of the skin ("subcutaneous.")

**The dose varies but usually one injection per week is administered by the patient, a friend or family member, or a healthcare provider.**

**For supplies you will need the medication, 1 cc syringes with needles (tuberculin syringes work very well), and alcohol wipes.**

**It is very important that the skin is clean and wiped with an alcohol prep before the injection. The top of the vial of erythropoietin should also be wiped off with alcohol. The skin is pinched and the needle is placed in the area of pinched skin and the syringe is slowly emptied.**

## Adherence

This refers to your willingness, ability, and actual performance in taking your medications.

For further information and tips on adherence, go to the **Adherence section** of this site.

It is very important to take every dose that is prescribed unless instructed by your healthcare provider.

Do not adjust the amount of the dose or the frequency of erythropoietin without speaking to your healthcare provider first.

## Possible Side Effects

The package insert for most drugs including erythropoietin is often overwhelming and scary with perhaps an overemphasis on side effects. We have summarized the important and more common problems here.

**Most people take erythropoietin without any or very many side effects.**

Many side effects get better with time.

The most frequent side effects of erythropoietin are a headache.

Rarely erythropoietin can cause blood clots, heart attacks, or strokes.

## Interactions

This refers to the way that erythropoietin affects other medications and how other medications might affect erythropoietin.

**Make sure that your healthcare provider is aware of all the medications you are taking so that important and possibly dangerous interactions are not overlooked.**

**Report to you healthcare provider or go to an Emergency Room** if you have severe side effects, increasing side effects, increasing shortness of breath, fever, eye pain or redness, loss of vision, jaundice (eyes and skin turn yellow,) nausea and vomiting (so that you cannot hold down your food and liquids) or rash.

You can download this handout in PDF format by clicking [HERE](#).

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