

Erythropoiesis-stimulating Agents (ESAs) for People With Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and Active Cancer or a History of Cancer or Stroke

- If you have chronic kidney disease (CKD), your health care provider may order erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA) medications (like Aranesp® or Eprex®) for you. These medications help take the place of a hormone called erythropoietin (EPO).
- EPO is released by your kidneys to tell your bone marrow to make more red blood cells. If you have CKD, your kidneys do not release enough EPO. If you do not have enough EPO, your body cannot make enough red blood cells.
- Not having enough red blood cells is called anemia. Anemia can make you feel tired, weak, or short of breath (have trouble breathing).

If you have CKD and active cancer, or a history of cancer or stroke, it is important to carefully consider the risks and benefits of ESAs.

Risks

- › Possible higher risk of cancer, stroke, or death

Benefits

- › Improved symptoms of anemia
- › Prevents the need for a blood transfusion. **This is important**, since blood transfusions can cause serious reactions or death.

- **If you have active cancer, or a history of cancer or stroke**, your health care team (doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, and pharmacists) will work with you to decide whether an ESA is right for you. They will talk with you about:
 - › Your tumour type and stage
 - › Your stroke history
 - › How bad your anemia is
 - › Your life expectancy (how long you are expected to live)
 - › Possible risks of a blood transfusion
 - › Risk of your tumour growing or coming back
- They may recommend a lower dose of an ESA to target a lower hemoglobin range. Hemoglobin is the part of a red blood cell that carries oxygen throughout your body.
- If you were recently diagnosed with cancer or had a stroke, they may stop your ESA.
- After talking with your health care team about the risks and benefits of ESAs, it is up to you to decide if you will take them. You will need to give verbal or written informed consent.
- Your health care team will monitor and check you regularly to make sure the ESA is helping without causing serious side effects or causing the cancer to come back.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk with a member of your health care team.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

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Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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