

## Raised serum ferritin

### Overview - What is serum ferritin?

**Ferritin** is a protein that carries iron around in the blood and can be used to measure the amount of iron in the body. If ferritin level is high, the amount of iron in the blood may also be high. If the ferritin is low, this often means the body is low in iron. Unfortunately, high levels of ferritin in the blood do not always mean the amount of iron in the body is high since there are other factors that can increase the level of ferritin.

### What is the problem with a high serum ferritin?

The main problem with a high serum ferritin is that it may reflect high stores of iron in the body. Although iron is important for lots of processes in the body, too much iron over a long period of time can be dangerous and cause a lot of problems with the function of body organs.

### What is the normal level of ferritin?

The normal level of ferritin varies a bit. For a female the normal level is 15 – 200 ug/l and for a male it is 30 – 300 ug/l. Some pathology companies use different ways to measure ferritin and so the “normal levels” may change a little.

Some people have very high levels of serum ferritin – greater than 1000 ug/l. These people will generally need some form of treatment for the high levels

### What are the main causes a raised serum ferritin?

Increased levels of serum ferritin may occur for a number of reasons. The first three of these reasons are not related to the amount of iron in the body. Levels may increase in the setting of other illnesses (e.g. infections, inflammatory conditions such as arthritis).

1. Increased levels may also be seen in problems with the liver (hepatitis)
2. Excessive alcohol can also increase the levels of serum ferritin
3. A major cause of raised serum ferritin is when there is too much iron in the body. This is usually related to a condition called **haemochromatosis**. Haemochromatosis is a condition where the body absorbs too much iron from the bowel leading to problems with iron overload and eventually to problems with the function of some of the organs.

### What tests do I need to do to find out why my levels of ferritin are high?

A number of blood tests and an ultrasound to look at the liver are usually needed in people who have high serum ferritin. These tests try and find a reason why the serum ferritin is high and then treatment, if necessary, can be arranged.

#### Resources used to produce this information sheet.

Pietrangelo A. Medical Progress: Hereditary Hemochromatosis — A New Look at an Old Disease. *New Engl J Med* 2004;350:2383-2397.

Andrews N. Disorders of Iron Metabolism. *New Engl J Med* 1999;341:1986-1995.

Page last updated: March 1, 2012

#### FURTHER QUESTIONS?

The information presented in this fact sheet is intended as a general guide only.

Patients should seek further advice and information about **raised serum ferritin** and their individual condition from their treating haematologist or doctor.

For additional information about blood disorders and their treatment, or to contact one of our specialist haematologists, visit the Melbourne Haematology website: [www.melbournehaematology.com.au](http://www.melbournehaematology.com.au)