

Raised Serum Ferritin

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 is high, iron in the body may also be high; if low, the body is often low in iron.

Unfortunately, high ferritin levels don't always mean body iron is high, since other factors can also raise ferritin levels.

What is the problem with a high serum ferritin?

The main concern with a high serum ferritin is that it may reflect high iron stores. While iron is important for many body processes, too much iron over a long period can be dangerous and affect the function of body organs.

What is the normal level of ferritin?

The normal level varies somewhat — for a female, 15–200 ug/l; for a male, 30–300 ug/l. Some pathology providers use different measurement methods, so “normal” ranges can vary slightly.

Some people have very high serum ferritin levels — greater than 1000 ug/l — and will generally need some form of treatment.

What are the main causes of a raised serum ferritin?

Increased ferritin levels may occur for a number of reasons. The first three below are not related to the amount of iron in the body.

- Levels may increase with other illnesses (e.g. infections, inflammatory conditions such as arthritis).
- Increased levels may also be seen with liver problems (hepatitis).
- Excessive alcohol intake can also increase ferritin levels.
- A major cause of raised ferritin is too much iron in the body, usually related to a condition called haemochromatosis, where the body absorbs too much iron from the bowel, leading to iron overload and eventually problems with organ function.

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

A number of blood tests, and usually an ultrasound of the liver, are needed to investigate raised serum ferritin. These tests aim to find the reason for the high level so that treatment, if necessary, can be arranged.

References

1. Pietrangelo A. Medical Progress: Hereditary Hemochromatosis — A New Look at an Old Disease. *New England Journal of Medicine* 2004;350:2383-2397.
2. Andrews N. Disorders of Iron Metabolism. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1999;341:1986-1995.

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