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High Ferritin: The Facts

What is ferritin?

Ferritin is a protein that stores iron in your body. Ferritin can rise if too much iron has been stored, or if your body is fighting a condition like inflammation, infection, or liver disease.

Why is my ferritin high?

Most people with high ferritin do not have too much iron. Common reasons include:

- Drinking alcohol
- Diabetes or metabolic syndrome (a group of conditions that includes high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and high cholesterol, as well as too much waist fat)
- Recent illness, inflammation, or infection
- Liver or kidney problems

When the body absorbs too much iron, this is called iron overload. The most common cause of iron overload is a condition that runs in families called hereditary hemochromatosis.

What tests might my doctor order?

To understand why your ferritin is high, your clinician may order:

- Transferrin saturation (TSAT) to measure how much iron is in your blood. TSAT helps show whether the problem is too much iron or some sort of condition or disease.
- Liver tests
- Complete blood count
- Blood sugar and cholesterol
- Tests for inflammation
- Sometimes an ultrasound of your liver

What can I do?

It depends on the cause, but here are some important things to think about:

- Limiting alcohol (or avoiding completely if your liver is inflamed)
- Getting regular exercise
- Being a healthy weight (even 5–10% weight loss can help)
- Managing diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure
- Treating infections or inflammation if present

When should I worry?

High ferritin does not always mean something serious, but tell your clinician if you have:

- Severe/chronic fatigue
- Joint pain/stiffness
- Skin darkening
- Abdominal pain
- Sexual problems
- Brain fog/poor concentration
- Menstrual irregularities or early menopause
- A family history of iron overload or liver disease

NOTES

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Sources: 1) HealthLink BC. *Ferritin*. https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/ferritin; **2)** Medical Services Commission of British Columbia Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee. *High ferritin and iron overload – investigation and management*. 2021. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/iron-overload.

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