

Iron for Everyone

What is iron?

Iron is an important mineral found in certain foods. It can be naturally present or added to foods.

Why do we need iron?

Iron is needed to form a part of blood called hemoglobin. Hemoglobin carries oxygen to all of the body's cells to keep them healthy. Too little iron in the blood can cause iron deficiency anemia.

What causes iron deficiency?

- **Poor eating habits or dieting:** A poorly planned diet, or not eating enough food can put you at risk for iron deficiency.
- **A poorly planned vegetarian diet:** Meat, fish and poultry are rich in iron. It takes careful planning to get enough iron from vegetarian food sources.
- **Heavy menstrual periods:** Iron is found in blood. Heavy periods may increase risk of developing iron deficiency.
- **Pregnancy:** Iron needs are high in pregnancy. By the third trimester the mother's iron needs are almost doubled. Iron is added to prenatal supplements to prevent deficiency.

Pregnancy

Iron is a key nutrient of pregnancy and is needed to help a baby grow.

Babies are born with iron stores that will last them until about 6 months of age. At 6 months, it is important to introduce iron-rich foods.

Mothers should take a prenatal supplement containing iron to prevent deficiency.

Symptoms of iron deficiency

- Very tired all the time
- Less able to fight infections
- Pale skin
- Lower attention span
- Muscle weakness
- Poor appetite



How much iron do I need?

Different people need different amounts of iron, depending on age, gender, and physical condition. Below is a chart indicating how much iron people need.

Age (in years)	Amount of iron (each day)
Males 14-18	11 mg
Males 19 +	8 mg
Females 14-18	15 mg
Females 19-50	18 mg
Females 51 +	8 mg
Pregnancy	27 mg
Breastfeeding	9 mg

Foods contain two forms of iron

Heme Iron

Heme iron is found in animal foods. Our bodies absorb heme iron the best.



Chicken
75g (2.5oz)
0.4-2.0mg



Beef
75g (2.5oz)
1.4-3.3mg



Fish
75g (2.5oz)
1.4-1.7mg



Liver
75g (2.5oz)
4.9-13.4mg



Turkey
75g (2.5oz)
0.3-0.8mg



Lamb
75g (2.5oz)
1.3-2.1mg

Non-Heme Iron

Non-heme iron is found in plant foods and is not absorbed as well by the body as heme iron.



1 slice whole
wheat bread
1.2mg



Lentils
3/4 cup (175ml)
4.1-4.9mg



Spinach
1/2c (125ml)
2.0-3.4mg



2 large eggs
1.2-1.8mg



Dried fruit 1/4
cup (60ml)
1.6mg



Oatmeal
3/4 cup (175ml)
4.5-6.6mg

How to increase absorption of non-heme iron

- Non-heme iron can be better used by the body when you eat food containing heme iron at the same time.
- Foods rich in vitamin C can also help your body use non-heme iron. **Vitamin C rich foods** include:



Citrus Fruits



Cantaloupe



Strawberries



Broccoli



Peppers



Tomatoes



Potatoes

Tips to boost iron

- ◆ Serve meat, poultry or fish (heme iron) with plant-based foods such as grains, legumes, vegetables or fruit (non-heme iron).
- ◆ Include foods high in vitamin C at each meal to help absorb more non-heme iron from grains, legumes, and vegetables and fruit.
- ◆ Use a variety of legumes (e.g., beans, lentils) in soups, stews, and salads.
- ◆ Sprinkle wheat germ on cereals or add it to meatloaf and muffins.
- ◆ Add dried fruits (e.g., apricots, prunes, dates or raisins) to cereals and baked goods.
- ◆ Drink coffee and tea in moderation and avoid drinking these beverages with meals as they may decrease the amount of iron absorbed from foods.
- ◆ Add fruit to a bowl of whole grain cereal or have it on the side.
- ◆ Enjoy enriched pasta with tomato sauce.

What about iron supplements?

If you are healthy and eating a variety of foods every day, iron supplements are not usually necessary (except in pregnancy). It is possible to get too much iron from an iron supplement. Always check with your health care provider before taking iron supplements. Keep supplements out of reach of children.



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