

Nutrition Facts

Iron for Babies and Young Children

What is iron and why is it important?

Iron is a mineral found in many foods and in your blood. Iron in the blood carries oxygen to all parts of the body. Iron helps build red blood cells, is important for healthy brain development and helps cells work properly. If your child is not getting enough iron, they could develop anemia. Children with anemia can have a poor appetite, poor weight gain, lack of energy, irritability, and learning difficulties.

Where does iron come from?

From birth to about 6 months:

Full term babies use the stores of iron that they were born with for the first 6 months of life, and receive additional iron through their mother's breastmilk. Iron found in breast milk is very well absorbed.

At about 6 months:













At about 6 months, your baby's iron stores will run out, and your baby will need additional iron from food. Offer iron rich foods as your baby's first foods (e.g. beef, chicken, turkey, lamb, fish, pork, whole eggs, tofu, legumes, fortified infant cereal).

Did you know...

A women's iron needs increase by 50% during pregnancy.

In the first year of life, babies are growing so fast that they need more iron than a full grown man.

Foods Contain Two Forms of Iron

| Heme Iron | | | Non-Heme Iron | | |
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| Heme iron is found in animal foods. Our bodies absorb heme iron the best. | | | Non-heme iron is found in plant foods and is not absorbed as well by the body as heme iron. | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Chicken | Beef | Fish | Whole grain & enriched breads and cereals | Lentils, dried peas, beans | Dark leafy green vegetables |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Liver | Turkey | Lamb | Eggs, whole coked | Dried fruit | Iron fortified infant cereal |

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 help your body use non-heme iron. Vitamin C rich foods include:



Citrus Fruits



Cantaloupe



Strawberries



Broccoli



Peppers



Tomato

Does my Child Need an Iron Supplement?

Full-term, breastfed babies who start eating iron rich foods at 6 about months of age usually do not need an iron supplement. Talk to your health care provider about iron.

Tips for Increasing your Child's Iron Intake

1. Breastfeed for as long as possible. The iron in breastmilk is the best absorbed iron.
2. Introduce a variety of iron-rich foods at about 6 months of age.
3. Do not give you child (over 9 months of age) more than 500-750ml of milk/day. Too much milk will make you child feed full and decrease their appetite for iron rich foods.
4. Include at least one iron-rich food and one food rich in vitamin C at each meal.
5. Add cooked dried beans or lentils to soups, stews or casseroles.

Iron Boosting Muffins

250 mL (1 cup) whole wheat flour
125 mL (1/2 cup) sugar
10 mL (2 tsp) baking powder
250 mL (1 cup) infant cereal, any variety
125 mL (1/2 cup) water
30 mL (2 Tbsp.) oil
3 eggs, beaten

Instructions

- Preheat oven at 180°C (350°F).
- Mix flour, sugar, baking powder and infant cereal together in a large bowl.
- Mix water, oil and eggs in a separate bowl.
- Combine wet and dry ingredients only until blended.
- Spoon batter into 24 paper lined muffin cups. Bake for about 20 minutes.

Makes 24 Mini Muffins

Adapted with permission from HealthLinkBC