

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.

Did you know...

A woman'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.

Where does iron come from?

From birth to about 6 months of age:

Full-term babies use the stores of iron that they were born with for the first 6 months of life and receive additional iron from breastmilk. Iron found in breastmilk is very well absorbed.

At about 6 months of age:

At about 6 months of age, 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, lentils, iron fortified infant cereal).

Foods contain two forms of iron

Heme Iron			Non-Heme Iron		
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 and beans	Dark leafy green vegetables
					
Liver	Turkey	Lamb	Eggs, whole cooked	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. Eat these at the same time. **Vitamin C rich foods** include:



Citrus Fruits



Cantaloupe



Strawberries



Broccoli



Peppers



Tomatoes

Does my child need an iron supplement?

Full-term, breastfed babies who start eating iron-rich foods at about 6 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 your child (over 9 months of age) more than 500-750ml of milk per day. Too much milk will make your child feel 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 and 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
 60 mL (1/4 cup) 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

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