

Information adapted from the
National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and the
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

EDUCATION

Iron: How To Get Enough



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Combine Iron and Vitamin C

Iron from meat, poultry and fish is easier for your body to absorb than iron from vegetables, fruit and grain sources. Iron from all sources can be absorbed better when you eat them at the same time as a food that contains vitamin C.

Good sources of vitamin C include:

- oranges and orange juice
- sweet peppers
- kiwi
- papaya, guava, mango
- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- strawberries
- grapefruit and grapefruit juice
- dark, leafy greens (kale, collards, mustards)
- cantaloupe
- tomatoes and tomato juice.

Whom To Call For Questions

If you have questions or concerns, call your primary care provider or dietitian.

Your Need for Iron

Iron is an essential mineral your body needs for energy.

Most of the iron in your body is found in the red part of your blood. This part of your blood, called hemoglobin, carries oxygen to your body's tissues. Smaller amounts of iron carry oxygen to your muscles, nourish cells and help your body function. Some iron is also stored for future use.

Most people can get enough iron by eating the right amounts of iron-rich foods.

Daily Amount of Iron Needed

How much iron do you need each day? The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are based on age and gender.

For infants and children:

- 6 to 12 months: 6.9 mg
- 1 to 3 years: 3 mg
- 4 to 8 years: 4.1 mg

For males:

- 9 to 13 years: 5.9 mg
- 14 to 18 years: 7.7 mg
- 19 and older: 6 mg

For females:

- 9 to 13 years: 5.7 mg
- 14 to 18 years: 7.9 mg
- 14 to 18 years and pregnant: 23 mg
- 14 to 18 years and lactating (nursing): 7 mg
- 19 to 50 years: 8.1 mg
- 19 to 50 years and pregnant: 22 mg
- 19 to 50 years and lactating: 6.5 mg
- 51 and older: 5 mg

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Information Center

dandelion greens (cooked)	1 cup	1.8 mg
dates (dried)	1 ounce	3 mg
egg (large)	1	0.9 mg
kale	1 cup	1 mg
macaroni (dry, enriched)	2 ounces	1.9 mg
mustard greens (cooked)	1 cup	1.2 mg
noodles (dry, enriched)	2 ounces	2.3 mg
peanut butter	2 tablespoons	0.7 mg
raisins (seedless)	¼ cup	0.7 mg
rice (long grain or instant)	½ cup	1.4 mg
salmon (canned)	3 ounces	0.5 mg
shrimp (cooked)	3 ounces	0.3 mg
spaghetti (dry, enriched)	2 ounces	1.9 mg
spinach (raw or cooked)	½ cup	0.4 to 1.5 mg
strawberries (raw, cleaned)	1 cup	0.6 mg
tomato juice (canned)	½ cup	0.5 mg
tuna (canned)	3 ounces	1.4 mg
turnip greens	1 cup	0.3 mg
waffle (enriched)	1 to 1 ½ (½-inch diameter)	2.3 mg

green peas (cooked)	½ cup	1.2 mg
lentils (dry)	¼ cup	3.6 mg
lima beans (cooked)	½ cup	2.2 mg
liver (chicken)	1 ounce	2.7 mg
mung beans (dry)	¼ cup	3.5 mg
navy beans (cooked)	½ cup	2.2 mg
peanuts (roasted, no skins)	3 ½ ounces	2.2 mg
pork (cooked)	3 ounces	0.5 to 1.5 mg
red beans (dry)	¼ cup	3.1 mg
sardines	3 ounces	1.9 mg
soybeans (cooked)	½ cup	0.6 mg
veal (cooked)	3 ounces	0.4 mg

Contributing Sources of Iron

This chart shows average servings of foods that have 2 mg or less of iron.

Food	Serving	Amount of Iron
bread (white, enriched)	1 slice	0.9 mg
bread (whole grain)	1 slice	0.8 mg
chard (cooked)	1 cup	4 mg
chicken (cooked)	3 ounces	1.2 mg
chicken heart	1 ounce	2.5 mg

Iron Deficiency Anemia

If you don't get enough iron from the foods you eat, you could develop iron deficiency anemia. This condition means you aren't getting enough iron to make hemoglobin, leading to a loss of energy. Signs of iron deficiency anemia include:

- weakness
- fatigue (feeling tired)
- lower than normal body temperature
- frequent illnesses or infections
- problems concentrating
- poor appetite.

Who is at Risk for Iron Deficiency Anemia

You are at risk for iron deficiency anemia if you:

- are pregnant
- are going through a growth spurt
- don't get enough iron-rich foods, or follow a vegetarian meal plan
- have a poor appetite
- have a rapid or lengthy blood loss (including heavy menstrual periods)
- receive dialysis because of kidney failure.

In general:

- Infants younger than 1 year old who are fed cow's milk are at risk of not getting enough iron because cow's milk is a poor source of iron. Breast milk or iron-fortified formula is better.

- Older infants and toddlers, teenage girls, women of child-bearing age and pregnant women are at greatest risk because they have the greatest need for iron.
- Adult men and postmenopausal women are at least risk because they lose very little iron except through bleeding.

If you are at risk for iron deficiency anemia, you may need to eat more iron-rich foods and/or take iron supplements.

Iron Supplements

Your primary care provider may suggest an iron supplement if you have an iron deficiency because you don't get enough iron from the foods you eat. Follow his or her instructions.

Iron supplements can cause stomach or intestinal upsets such as nausea (upset stomach), constipation or diarrhea. Too much stored iron can damage internal organs.

Coffee, tea and calcium can block the iron from being absorbed in your body. Do not drink coffee or tea, and do not take a calcium supplement within 1 hour of taking an iron supplement.

Iron in Foods

When grocery shopping, look for bread products, cereals and pastas that say "enriched" or "iron fortified" on the label. Use these foods as sources of iron every day.

Major Sources of Iron

This chart shows average servings of foods that are high in iron (more than 4 mg).

Food	Serving	Amount of Iron
Cream of Wheat® (quick/instant)	1 cup	12 mg
liver (beef)	3 ounces	5.4 mg
liver (calf)	1 ounce	5 mg
prune juice	½ cup	1.5 mg

Fortified cereals that list 10 mg of iron per ounce or 100 percent recommended dietary intake per serving are also major sources.

Moderate Sources of Iron

This chart shows average servings of foods that are moderate sources in iron (2 to 4 mg).

Food	Serving	Amount of Iron
All-Bran® cereal	½ cup	2.3 mg
almonds (dried, unblanched)	½ cup	2 mg
apricots (dried)	8 large halves	0.7 mg
baked beans (no pork)	½ cup	1.5 mg
beef (cooked)	3 ounces	1.5 to 2 mg