

Iron in the Diet

What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that is important to all cells in your body. Blood cells need iron to bring oxygen to the body cells. You can get iron deficiency anemia if you don't get enough iron. People who have iron deficiency anemia are often tired and don't have much energy.

Iron deficiency anemia may result from:

- Not getting enough iron from your diet
- Losing a lot of blood
- Changes during pregnancy

How much iron do I need?

The amount of iron you need depends on your age and whether you are a man or a woman:

GROUP	MILLIGRAMS (mg) IRON PER DAY
Males over 18 years old	8 mg
Females 19 to 50 years old	18 mg
Females over 50 years old	8 mg
Pregnant females	27 mg
Breast-feeding females 14 to 18 years old	10 mg
Breast-feeding females 19 to 50 years old	9 mg

How can I eat the right amount of iron?

Iron is found in many kinds of foods. The best way to get enough iron is to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. There are 2 types of iron:

- **Heme iron** is found in meat, poultry, and fish. Heme foods that are very high in iron, such as beef and chicken liver, are also very high in cholesterol. Eat these foods in limited amounts.
- **Nonheme iron** is found in fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, eggs, dairy products, and iron-enriched foods.

It's harder for the body to absorb iron from plants than from meat, poultry, and fish. Eat foods that contain vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, broccoli, and tomatoes, when you eat plant foods that have iron. Eating these foods together helps your body to absorb the iron better. Eating heme iron at the same time as nonheme iron also helps your body absorb the iron better. This is very important if:

- You have a condition that makes you lose iron (for example, women who have heavy menstrual periods).
- You need more iron (for example, during pregnancy).
- You have a condition that keeps your body from absorbing iron well, such as Crohn's or celiac disease.

Some foods, supplements, and medicines can make it harder for your body to absorb iron. It is best to eat iron at a different time than when you have:

- Milk and other dairy products
- Foods with a lot of fiber
- Coffee, tea, and carbonated drinks (even decaffeinated)
- Calcium supplements
- Antacids

Do I need an iron supplement?

If you get enough iron in your diet you don't need a supplement. Taking supplements you don't need may be harmful. Too much iron in the body can damage your heart and liver.

If you have anemia, your healthcare provider may tell you to take an iron supplement. Iron pills can have side effects such as cramps, nausea, and constipation. Taking the iron at mealtimes can help prevent stomach upset. Extra iron may increase nausea during the first 3 months of pregnancy. If you take iron supplements in the morning and feel nauseated, try taking the pills at night before bedtime. To help prevent constipation, make sure you drink enough fluid and have enough fiber in your diet.

If you are thinking of taking a supplement that contains iron, ask your healthcare provider about it first. With your provider's approval, take the right amount for your age.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Sources of Iron in Foods

Sources of Heme Iron

Food	Serving	mg Iron
liver, chicken	3 oz	7.2
liver, beef	3 oz	5.8
beef	3 oz	2.0 to 3.0
shrimp	3 oz	3.0
turkey, dark	3 oz	0.9
ground beef	3 oz	2.0 to 2.3
lamb	3 oz	1.7 to 2.3
chicken, dark	3 oz	1.3
chicken, white	3 oz	1.0
turkey, white	3 oz	0.5
fish	3 oz	0.2 to 1.2
pork, shoulder	3 oz	1.0
pork, loin	3 oz	0.8
tuna, white, water packed	3 oz	1.4



Sources of Nonheme Iron



Food	Serving	mg Iron
fortified breakfast cereals*	1 cup	4.2 to 18.7
soy beans, cooked	1/2 cup	4.4
pumpkin seeds	1 oz	4.2
molasses, blackstrap	1 tablespoon	3.5
lentils	1/2 cup	3.3
spinach, cooked	1/2 cup	3.2
bagel	3 1/2 in	4.3
tofu, extra firm	3 oz	2.7
prune juice	8 oz	3.0
potato, baked with skin	1 potato	4.0
red kidney beans	1/2 cup	2.6
green peas	1 cup	2.4
navy beans	1/2 cup	2.2
garbanzo beans	1/2 cup	2.4
black-eyed peas	1/2 cup	2.0
asparagus, cooked	4 spears	1.0
avocado	1 avocado	1.0 to 2.0
macaroni, enriched, cooked	1 cup	1.7
green beans, cooked	1 cup	1.6
enriched rice, cooked	1/2 cup	1.4
apricots, dried	5 apricots	0.9
dates	5 dates	0.4
wheat germ, toasted	2 tablespoons	1.0
whole wheat bread	1 slice	0.9
raisins	1/4 cup	0.7

Copyright ©2014 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All rights reserved.