



## What is iron?

Iron is an essential mineral found in every living cell of your body.

Iron:

- Builds red blood cells
- Helps cells work in the body
- Carries oxygen from the lungs to every cell in the body
- Helps the brain work at its best

## What happens if I don't get enough iron?

You may:

- Feel tired
- Look pale
- Have trouble concentrating on your work
- Feel out of breath
- Not have enough energy to do the things you want
- Feel irritable

## How much do I need?

Women 19 to 49 years of age should aim to have 18 mg of iron each day. These recommendations are 40% higher than in the past. They reflect a new understanding of the varying needs for iron among women.

## Did you know?

*During pregnancy you need even more iron. Speak to your family physician, obstetrician or registered dietitian.*

## You may need more iron every day if you:

- Avoid meat products
- Use an intra-uterine device (this makes you bleed more)
- Have recently given a blood donation

### Did you know?

*If you do not eat any meat, fish or poultry, you need almost twice as much iron as women who do.*

## What do I need to eat to get enough iron?

It is important to get iron from a variety of foods. Iron comes in two forms:

### 1. Heme iron is very easily absorbed by your body.

Foods with heme iron:

- Beef
- Lamb
- Pork
- Liver
- Veal
- Turkey and chicken (dark meat has more iron)
- Fish and seafood



### 2. Non-heme iron is not absorbed as well as heme iron.

Foods with non-heme iron:

- Breakfast cereals (fortified with iron)
- Breads and pasta (whole grain and enriched)
- Lentils, dried peas and beans
- Seeds and nuts (pumpkin, sesame, peanuts)
- Dried fruit (raisins, apricots)
- Dark green, leafy vegetables
- Eggs



## Ways to get the most iron from my food

### 1. Go for heme:

Heme iron is easier to absorb than non-heme iron. Eating meat, fish or poultry also helps the body to use non-heme iron from other foods.

*Iron supplements should only be taken after talking to a registered dietitian or your family doctor about your iron needs.*

### 2. Include vitamin C-rich foods with your meal.

Foods that contain vitamin C help the body absorb non-heme iron.

- Good sources of vitamin C**
- Green, yellow and red peppers
  - Oranges, grapefruits, Clementines, mandarin
  - Strawberries, raspberries, kiwis
  - Tomatoes, turnips
  - Cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
  - 100% juices (orange, tomato and apple with added vitamin C)

### 3. Avoid tea and coffee during meals:

Tea and coffee contain polyphenols, which lower the amount of non-heme iron your body can absorb.



- Are you female?
- Do you avoid red meat?
- Do you often skip meals?
- Are you trying to lose weight by eating less?
- Do you usually drink tea or coffee with your meals?
- Do you often have heavy menstrual periods?

**If you answered "yes" to 2 or more of these questions, you may not be getting enough iron.**

**Get the most iron from non-heme foods - Here's how it works!**

**CHILI**

**START WITH** 250 mL red kidney beans



**ADD** 250 mL canned tomatoes



**Vitamin C**  
in tomatoes  
increases iron  
absorption!

**ADD** 75 grams cooked lean ground beef



**Meat** and  
iron  
increases iron  
absorption!

①—② 1 barbell = amount of iron absorbed



**Easy steps to iron-rich eating**

Enjoy a variety of foods from *Eating Well* with Canada's Food Guide.

**Sample day's menu with the recommended amount of iron**

- breakfast:** Bowl of cereal with strawberries and milk
- lunch:** Tuna or egg salad sandwich on two slices of whole wheat bread with mayonnaise, carrot sticks, apple and milk
- inner:** Beef stir-fry with mixed vegetables on noodles and juice
- snacks:** Mixed dried fruit and a bran muffin

1. Eat foods high in heme iron.
  - Choose beef, lamb, pork, veal, poultry and fish more often.
2. Combine foods high in non-heme iron with meat, fish, poultry and/or vitamin C-rich foods to increase iron absorption.
  - Add tuna to cheese pasta.
  - Add ground beef to bean chili.
3. Avoid drinking coffee or tea with your meal.
  - Wait for at least one hour to have these drinks.
4. If you do NOT eat meat, fish or poultry, include vitamin C-rich foods with your meals to increase absorption of non-heme iron.
  - Add strawberries or dried cranberries to breakfast cereal.
  - Drink a glass of juice with a meatless chili.

**If you have any questions or concerns about iron, talk to a registered dietitian or your family doctor.**

This pamphlet was developed and reviewed by the Beef Information Centre, in collaboration with expert Canadian researchers and a dedicated Advisory Committee comprised of health professionals from across Canada.

Pamphlets on *Iron and Infants and Iron and Adolescent Females* are also available. To order, please contact the Beef Information Centre at [www.beefinfo.org](http://www.beefinfo.org) or 1-888-248-BEEF.

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# Iron



**Are YOU getting enough? You need it everyday!**

**Beef** Information Centre

Questions about beef? Visit [www.beefinfo.org](http://www.beefinfo.org) or call 1-888-248-BEEF.

| Foods with Higher Iron Content                           | Serving Size      | Iron (mg)   |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| <b>ANIMAL SOURCE</b>                                     |                   |             |
| Beef   | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 3           |
| Ground Meat (chicken, pork, turkey)                      | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 1.5         |
| Chicken  | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 2           |
| Pork   | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 1.1         |
| Pork Liver   | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 13          |
| Beef Liver   | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 5           |
| Clams  | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 21          |
| Eggs   | 75 g (2.5 ounces) | 1.2 - 1.8   |
| <b>PLANT SOURCE</b>                                      |                   |             |
| Pumpkin and squash seeds                                 | 60 mL (1/4 cup)   | 8.5         |
| Tofu   | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 8           |
| Lentils  | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 5           |
| Beans (white, kidney, navy, black, pinto)                | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 2.5 - 5     |
| Baked beans  | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 2.2         |
| Nuts (cashews, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachio, macadamia) | 60 mL (1/4 cup)   | 1.5 - 2.2   |
| Hummus   | 60 mL (1/4 cup)   | 1.4         |
| Blackstrap molasses                                      | 15 mL (1 Tbsp.)   | 3.6         |
| Cream of wheat   | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 6           |
| Oatmeal (instant)  | 175 mL (3/4 cup)  | 6           |
| Cereal, dry  | 30 g              | Check label |
| Granola bar - oats, fruits and nut                       | 1 bar             | 2.3         |
| Spinach, cooked  | 125 mL (1/2 cup)  | 3.5         |
| Potato with skin   | 1 large           | 2           |
| Apricots, dried  | 60 mL (1/4 cup)   | 1.6         |
| Kale, cooked   | 125 mL (1/2 cup)  | 1.3         |
| Tomato sauce   | 125 mL (1/2 cup)  | 1.3         |

Information provided by BioSyent Pharma Inc.,  
makers of FeraMAX® 150 oral iron supplement.



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## **WHAT TO DO WHEN TAKING AN IRON SUPPLEMENT?**

To get the most benefit out of taking your iron supplement and iron content food:

1. Take Vitamin C or drink orange juice with your pills (ascorbic acid).
2. Steam vegetables to help retain their iron content.

## **WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN TAKING AN IRON SUPPLEMENT?**

Do not take your iron supplements:

1. Within 2 hours of taking antacids or tetracycline (an antibiotic).
2. With certain foods, chemicals and nutrients. These include:
  - Tea, coffee chocolate, and other food or beverages high in caffeine
  - Milk and other calcium-rich foods or supplements
  - High-fiber foods, such as bran, whole grains, nuts, and raw green vegetables.

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