

Making the Most of Iron

Enjoy a vitamin C-rich food - such as an orange, cantaloupe, green pepper, or broccoli - right along with it: for example, you get more iron from a peanut butter sandwich on whole-wheat bread if you eat it with a glass of orange juice. Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron.

Add a little meat, poultry, or fish to foods of plant origin and egg yolks: for example, include some ground beef in a pot of chili, or sliced lean ham in an egg omelette. The presence of heme iron boosts the absorption of non-heme iron.

Cook with a cast iron skillet whenever possible. Sounds like an old wive's tale, but you can get more iron into your diet using a cast iron skillet while cooking.

Avoid consuming excessive amounts of tannins in tea and calcium; these products decrease the absorption of iron.

Anemia

An iron deficiency is usually defined as dwindling reserves of iron in the body in general. Anemia, however, refers specifically to reduced levels of hemoglobin. With less iron present, the blood cells cannot ferry sufficient oxygen from the lungs to body tissues. Symptoms of anemia include extreme fatigue, overall weakness, headaches, apathy and paleness.

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All you need to
know about

IRON

and

ANEMIA

What is Iron?

Iron is a mineral that is essential not only to good health but also to life itself. The bulk of the iron in the human body is in the red blood cells' hemoglobin; in fact, it is what makes blood red. Hemoglobin shuttles oxygen from the lungs to every body cell, and without iron, hemoglobin cannot do its job. Another compound, myoglobin, grabs iron from hemoglobin and stores it in muscles where it is crucial to proper muscle function. On hemoglobin's trip to the lungs, its iron carries carbon dioxide, which we then expel as we exhale. And that's not all. Iron is part of the chemical makeup of several vital enzymes and proteins and plays a major role in energy metabolism.



Iron in Foods

Iron comes from a wide variety of foods - both animal and plant origin. All dietary iron, however, is not created equal. There are two basic types: Heme and Non-heme iron. Most of the iron from meat, poultry, and fish is heme iron, which is best absorbed by the body. Foods of plant origin contain mostly non-heme iron. And egg yolks have mostly non-heme iron.

RDA for Iron

The body is highly adaptive. The body will absorb more iron when stores decrease and absorb less iron when iron stores increase. Regardless, there are different RDA's set for those of different periods of growth and development.

For men (18 and over):

10-12 mg per day

For women (11-50):

15 mg per day*

*Pregnant women should consume higher amounts. Consult your healthcare provider.

Counting Up Iron

Food	Approximate Iron (Milligrams)
SOURCES OF MOSTLY HEME IRON	
Beef liver, braised (3 oz)	5.8
Lean sirloin, broiled (3 oz)	2.9
Lean ground beef, broiled (3 oz)	1.8
Skinless chicken breast, roasted (3 oz)	1.1
Pork, lean, roasted (3 oz)	1.0
Salmon, canned with bone (3 oz)	0.7
SOURCES OF NON-HEME IRON	
Fortified breakfast cereal (1 cup)	4.5-18
Pumpkin seeds (1 oz)	4.25
Bran (1/2 cup)	3.5
Blackstrap molasses (1 Tbsp)	3.5
Soybean nuts (1/2 cup)	4.0
Spinach, boiled (1/2 cup)	3.2
Red kidney beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	2.6
Lima beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	2.5
Prune juice (3/4 cup)	2.3
Pretzels (1 oz)	1.3
Enriched rice, cooked (1/2 cup)	1.2
Whole-wheat bread (1 slice)	0.9
Egg yolk, large (1)	0.7
Raisins, seedless (1/3 cup)	1.1
Prunes, dried (5)	1.1
Green beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	0.8
Peanut butter, chunky (2 Tbsp)	0.6
Apricots, dried (3)	0.6
White bread, enriched (1 slice)	0.7
Cod, broiled (3 oz)	0.4
Zucchini, cooked (1/2 cup)	0.3
Cranberry juice (3/4 cup)	0.3
Unenriched rice, cooked (1/2 cup)	0.2
Grapes (1/3 cup)	0.1
Egg white, large (1)	<0.1