

Strategies for Iron Intake

Iron is needed to make *hemoglobin*, the red substance in blood, which carries oxygen from your lungs to every organ in your body. Iron is also a component of the proteins and enzymes, which regulate cellular metabolism. When your red blood cells don't have enough iron, anemia can result.

Use a Combination of Strategies to Meet your Iron Needs

1. **Keep your diet adequate in all essential nutrients.**
You can't build red blood cells with iron alone; you must provide plenty of calories (*food energy*) in addition to protein, vitamins and minerals. You can meet your basic nutrition needs by following the *Food Guide Pyramid* guidelines.
2. **Chose to eat meat, poultry, and fish regularly.**
Iron from animal sources is absorbed twice as well as the iron available from plant sources. Animal proteins contain something known as the *meat factor* that seems to improve the amount of iron absorbed from meats and the other foods consumed during a meal. *For example:* Add chopped ham to split-pea soup, or a little ground beef or chicken to lentil stew.
3. **Chose to have a good source of vitamin-C along with iron-rich foods.**
Together these foods will improve iron absorption. *For example:* With your breakfast eggs serve grapefruit sections, or with a Friday night's broiled fish, choose steamed red potatoes with the peelings.

Sources of Vitamin-C

Excellent sources:
(Choose *one* ½ cup serving daily)

Broccoli
Brussel sprouts
Cabbage
Cantaloupe
Grapefruit and juice
Greens: beet, collards, kale, mustard,
spinach, turnip
kohlrabi
kiwi
mango
oranges and juice
papaya
peppers, green and red

Good sources:
(Choose *two* ½ cup servings daily).

asparagus
beat sprouts (raw)
chard
honeydew melon
okra
potatoes, with peels
tangerines
tomatoes and juice

4. **Choose snacks that are high in iron.**
Include dried fruits, vegetable sticks, whole-grain or enriched breads, crackers and cereals, nuts peanut butter and seeds frequently.
5. **Use cast-iron cookware.**
Cook foods in cast-iron pots and pans to increase the iron content, especially acidic foods (*tomatoes, spaghetti*).
6. **Avoid consuming substances known to impair iron absorption.**
Try to avoid over-consuming tea, antacids, and calcium di-phosphate (often used in calcium supplements) which can block iron absorption
7. **Consider using an iron supplement, but first discuss this decision with your primary care provider or registered dietitian.**
Iron taken unnecessarily can cause an upset stomach and/or constipation and can impair the absorption of other essential nutrients, including copper and zinc. Use of a multiple vitamin providing 100% of the RDA for iron is reasonable, but don't automatically take an iron supplement without consulting your health care professionals.

Iron Content of Common Foods

Excellent sources: 5-25 mg/serving	Good sources: 1-5 mg/serving	Fair sources: <1 mg/serving
3 oz calves liver	14.0	1 T blackstrap molasses 3.0
3 oz oysters (15)	13.0	3 oz lamb 3.0
3 oz liver, beef/chicken	8.5	1 T sorghum 2.5
3 oz clams	5.0	3 oz beef or pork 2.0
		½ c dried beans/peas, cooked 2.0
		2 T seeds 2.0
		½ c. greens 2.0
		½ c. peas 2.0
		3 oz. poultry 1.5
		½ c. prunes or dates 1.5
		3 oz fish 1.0
		1 egg 1.0
		1 T molasses 1.0
		2 T nuts 1.0
		½ c vegetables 0.8
		1 slice bread 0.7
		½ c pasta, cooked 0.7
		½-¾ c. cereal 0.7
		½ c. fruit or juice 0.6
		2 T peanut butter 0.5
		1 c milk 0.1