

Increasing Your Iron Intake

These guidelines will help you choose foods that are high in iron and give tips on ways to increase iron absorption.

Iron is a mineral that you need to carry oxygen in the body. Without enough iron you can become very tired, pale-looking and irritable. Young children, pregnant and pre-menopausal women, some athletes and vegetarians are more at risk for not getting enough iron in their diet.

Food contains iron in two forms: heme or non-heme.

- | Heme iron is found in meat, seafood and poultry. Heme iron is easily absorbed by your body.
- | Non-heme iron is found in plant foods and is not absorbed as well by your body.



Steps you can take

- | Eat a variety of heme and non-heme iron foods every day:
 - | Heme-iron foods include: beef, pork, chicken, turkey, lamb, oysters, shrimp and fish
 - | Non-heme iron foods include: dried peas, beans, lentils, oatmeal, cream of wheat cereal, iron-fortified pastas and cereals, tofu, tempeh, spinach, asparagus, beets, beet and turnip greens.
- | Increase absorption of non-heme iron foods by eating them at the same time as:
 - | heme-iron foods
 - | vitamin C-rich foods like oranges, grapefruits and pineapple, kiwis, papayas, strawberries, cantaloupes, mangoes, peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, cabbage, snow peas, cauliflower and kale.
- | Drink coffee or tea after meals. Drinking them with meals may decrease iron absorption.

Try these iron-rich snack and meal ideas:

- | Have a glass of orange or grapefruit juice with your cereal at breakfast.
- | Add raisins or other dried fruit to cereal, yogurt or in your favorite cookie/muffin recipe.
- | Make a spinach salad with oranges or grapefruit or strawberries.
- | Stir fry broccoli, peppers, snow peas with meats, poultry, fish or seafood.
- | Have spaghetti with tomato meat sauce rather than cream sauce.
- | Add cooked dried beans, peas or lentils to soups, stews or casseroles or eat them as a side dish with meats or poultry.

Reading Food Labels for Iron

- | Look at the ingredient list for the words "iron" or "ferrous". This will tell you that iron has been added to the product.
- | Look at the Nutrition Facts table. The Percent Daily Value (%DV) will tell you whether a food has a little or a lot of iron. Look for products that contain more than 15% DV.

Special Considerations

Vegetarians need about twice the amount of iron as non-vegetarians. Non-heme iron in plant foods is not absorbed as well as heme-iron from animal sources.

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