

The Importance of Iron in a Healthy Diet

Why is iron important?

Iron helps your body to make healthy blood. If you do not eat enough iron you may become very tired.

If the shortage of iron becomes worse you may feel weak and breathless. This may be anaemia and you should see your doctor who might check your iron levels.

This leaflet will help you to choose the right foods to make sure you have enough iron in your diet.

Where does iron come from?

Iron is found in a variety of foods and we can usually get enough iron by eating a healthy and varied diet.

Most of our dietary iron comes from meat, cereal products and vegetables.

We need to eat iron containing foods regularly as iron is not easily absorbed by the body.

What should a healthy diet contain?

It is important to eat a variety of foods and include some from each of the five food groups every day.

1. Bread, cereals, pasta, potatoes and rice
2. Fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned and dried all count)

3. Milk and dairy foods (choose lower fat versions if you are overweight or have been advised to cut down on fats)
4. Meat, fish, eggs, beans and lentils
5. Fats e.g. margarine, cooking oils (most people should use these sparingly and choose unsaturated fats e.g. sunflower oil, olive oil or rapeseed oil)

Which foods are good sources of iron?

The following foods are particularly rich sources of iron:

- Lean red meat, liver, kidney and corned beef. Pregnant women **should not** eat liver or liver products
- Tinned or fresh oily fish e.g. mackerel, sardines, pilchards
- Eggs
- Dark green vegetables e.g. spring cabbage, broccoli, spinach or curly kale
- Beans and pulses e.g. baked beans, chickpeas and lentils
- Nuts, including peanut butter. You should choose unsalted nuts if possible
- Breakfast cereals – most are fortified with iron. Check labels of all brands
- Dried fruit, especially apricots, figs, sultanas and raisins
- Bread, especially brown or wholemeal varieties

Absorption of iron

Certain foods can help the body to absorb iron and others can make absorption more difficult.

Vitamin C may help the body to absorb iron. To make the most of the iron that you eat, you should try to have Vitamin C rich foods with each meal e.g. citrus fruits, vegetables or salad and a glass of orange juice.

Tea or coffee may reduce how well your body absorbs iron. Try to avoid drinking these directly before, after or with meals.

Too much bran can also prevent your body absorbing iron; you should not add this to your food unless directed by a dietitian.

What if I am vegetarian or vegan?

Although iron from non-meat sources is more difficult for the body to absorb, people who follow a well balanced diet should be able to get enough iron in their diet.

Including some of the foods listed and following the advice above should help.

Do I need to take iron tablets?

Most people get all the iron that they need by eating a well balanced and varied diet.

You should only take iron tablets if your doctor advises you to do so, especially if you are pregnant.

Additional information

If you are losing weight or would like some additional support with your diet, please contact the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics on 0151 525 5980.

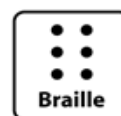
Additional information on dietary iron may be found on the following websites:

NHS UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/iron/>

British Dietetic Association:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/iron-rich-foods-iron-deficiency.html>



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

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