

Iron



**Are YOU
getting
enough?**

You need it everyday!



- **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.

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 meals:

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, mandarins
- 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.



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

CHILI

START WITH 250 mL
red kidney beans

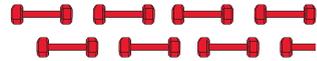


ADD 250 mL
canned tomatoes



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

ADD 75 grams
cooked lean ground beef



**Meat adds
iron and
increases iron
absorption!**

 1 barbell = amount of iron absorbed

Easy steps to iron-rich eating

1. 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

Dinner: Beef stir-fry with mixed vegetables on noodles and juice

Snacks: Mixed dried fruit and a bran muffin

2. Eat foods high in heme iron.

- Choose beef, lamb, pork, veal, poultry and fish more often.

3. 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.

4. Avoid drinking coffee or tea with your meal.

- Wait for at least one hour to have these drinks.

5. 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 or 1-888-248-BEEF.

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