

Iron



**A NINE MONTH
OLD BABY
needs more than
an adult man!**



Why does my baby need iron?

Iron:

- Carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of the body
- Helps build red blood cells
- Helps the brain develop
- Helps cells work in the body

Did you know?

Infants between 7 to 12 months of age are growing so fast that they need more iron than an adult man.

How does my baby get iron?

Before six months:

Full-term babies use the stores of iron that they were born with, along with the iron from breast milk or iron-fortified formula.

After six months:

Your baby will need iron from food in addition to the iron from breast milk. The main sources of iron for babies are iron-fortified infant cereal, iron-fortified formula and puréed/mashed meat, fish and poultry.

Did you know?

Young children with iron levels below normal do not learn as well.

What are the best sources of iron?

There are two kinds of iron in foods.

1. Heme iron is very easily absorbed by the body.

Foods with heme iron:

- Beef
- Lamb
- Pork
- Liver
- Veal
- Turkey and chicken (dark meat has more iron)
- Fish

Did you know?

Most red meats, like beef and lamb, have more iron than poultry or fish.

2. Non-heme iron is not absorbed as well as heme iron.

Foods with non-heme iron:

- Cereals (fortified with iron)
- Breads and pasta (whole grain and enriched)
- Lentils, dried peas and beans
- Dried fruit (raisins, apricots)
- Dark green, leafy vegetables
- Eggs (before 1 year of age offer only egg yolks, not egg whites)





Ways to get the most iron from food

1. Go for heme:

Meat, fish and poultry help the body absorb the non-heme iron from other foods.

2. Add vitamin C-rich foods to meals:

Did you know?

Eating meat, fish or poultry and vitamin C-rich foods can increase absorption of non-heme iron by up to 4 times.

Good sources of vitamin C

- Cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- Green, yellow and red peppers
- Cantaloupe, mango, kiwi, strawberries
- Oranges, grapefruits, clementines, mandarins
- Tomatoes, turnips
- 100% juices (orange, tomato and apple with added vitamin C)

Easy steps to iron-rich eating for 6 to 12 month olds

- 1.** Exclusively breastfeed your baby for the first 6 months of life. If you decide not to breastfeed, or when you stop, feed iron-fortified formula until at least 9 to 12 months of age.
- 2.** Introduce solid foods at 6 months of age with particular attention to iron-rich foods. Examples are iron-fortified infant cereals and puréed/mashed meat, fish and poultry. Continue to offer iron-rich foods beyond one year of age. Continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond is recommended.
- 3.** When you offer foods high in non-heme iron, include meat, fish, poultry and/or vitamin C-rich foods at each meal or snack. This increases the absorption of non-heme iron from foods.
- 4.** You may introduce whole cow's milk after 9 to 12 months of age. Cow's milk is a poor source of iron.



Try this tasty idea!

Purée of Meat

250 mL (1 cup) cubed meat
125 mL (1/2 cup) water or cooking
water from vegetables

Suitable foods to prepare:

beef, lamb, pork, veal, turkey or chicken

Method:

1. Place meat and water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for about 45 minutes or until meat is tender and cooked throughout.

For picky eaters, combine puréed meat with puréed fruits or vegetables, such as applesauce, squash, sweet potato, or any of their favourite foods.

Microwave method:

1. Place meat and water in microwave-safe bowl and heat on High until meat is tender and cooked throughout.
2. Remove from the heat and cool slightly.
3. Blend or purée the meat. If needed, add more boiled water.
4. Refrigerate for up to two days. Freeze remaining purée in single servings in ice cube trays.

Contact your local Health Department for more information on making your own baby food.

The next steps to iron-rich eating for 1 to 3 year olds

1. Offer a variety of iron-rich foods.
2. Combine non-heme iron foods, such as breakfast cereals, vegetables and baked beans, with meat, fish, poultry and/or vitamin C-rich foods, such as oranges, strawberries, tomatoes or red peppers.
3. Try not to offer too much juice or fruit drinks as this may decrease the amount of food your toddler eats, including iron-rich foods.
4. Encourage a healthy eating pattern by offering a variety of foods from each of the four food groups in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.
 - **Vegetables and Fruit:** including dark green and orange vegetables
 - **Grain Products:** breads, cereals, pasta and rice
 - **Milk and Alternatives:** milk, cheese, yogurt
 - **Meat and Alternatives:** lean meat, fish (without bones), poultry, dried beans, lentils and eggs

Iron is important for all members of the family. Make iron-rich foods a regular part of your meals.

If you have any questions or concerns about iron, talk to a registered dietitian, your family doctor or pediatrician.

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 Adolescent Females* and *Iron and Adult Women* are also available. To order, please contact the Beef Information Centre at www.beefinfo.org or 1-888-248-BEEF.

© 2007 Beef Information Centre. May be reproduced without permission provided no changes are made and credit is given.



Questions about beef?
Visit www.beefinfo.org or
call **1-888-248-BEEF**.