

Why is iron important?

Iron helps your body carry oxygen in the blood. It gives us energy, helps us concentrate and fights off infection.

Children, teenagers, menstruating women, pregnant women, vegetarians and vegans are most at risk of iron deficiency. Their iron needs are higher than other groups.

There are two types of iron found in food. Haem iron is found in animal foods. Haem iron is well absorbed by the body (about 20% absorbed). Haem iron is found in meat, poultry, fish and seafood. Generally, the more red or darker the meat is, the higher iron content it has.

Non-haem iron is found in plant foods and is not as well absorbed by the body (only about 5% absorbed). Non-haem iron is found in cereals, vegetables, legumes and nuts.

The actual amount of iron absorbed differs between individuals.

How can I increase my iron?

- Choose foods high in iron at each meal. It is recommended that up to a maximum of 445gm of lean, cooked, red meat can be consumed per week. If you are vegetarian, high-iron replacement foods will be needed (e.g. beans, lentils, fortified cereals, nuts, vegetables).
- Include fruits and vegetables with each meal. Foods high in vitamin C (e.g. berries, oranges, capsicum, tomato). Vitamin A (e.g. carrots, plant oils, dairy, eggs) increase our absorption of non-haem iron by 2-3 times. Try adding strawberries to your iron-fortified breakfast cereal. Or try adding capsicum and tomato to a spinach and bean salad.
- Avoid drinking tea and coffee with meals. They contain tannins that can reduce iron absorption. Drink tea and coffee between meals.

Please note that iron supplements should not be taken without medical advice.

*Fortified foods are foods which have vitamins or minerals added to them.

Best sources of iron (in mg)



Beef (lean), cooked
100g = 2-3mg



Veal (lean), cooked
100g = 1.1-1.9mg



Lamb (lean), cooked
100g = 2.0-2.5mg



Pork (lean), cooked
100g = 0.6-1.0mg



Chicken (no skin), cooked
100g = 0.4-0.9mg



Kangaroo, cooked
100g = 3.2 mg



Tuna, canned in water
100g = 1.0-1.3mg



Salmon, canned or grilled
100g = 1.1-1.3mg



Sardines, canned in water
100g = 2.3mg



Oyster, raw
6 = 3.5mg



Egg, large,
65-70g = 1.0mg



Tofu, firm,
100g = 2.3-2.9mg

Other sources of iron (in mg)



Baked beans
small can, 130g = 1.66mg



Legumes/pulses/beans, cooked
½ cup = 2.0-2.5mg



Spinach, raw & chopped
1 cup = 1.2mg



Chinese green leafy vegetables: bok choy, gai lan, cooked, ½ cup = 2.5mg



Fortified breakfast cereal
1 cup = 3.0mg



Muesli, natural/untoasted
¼ cup = 2.0mg



Wholemeal bread
2 slices = 1.1-3.9mg



Peanut butter
2 tablespoons = 0.6mg



Almonds
20 = 0.9mg



Pumpkin seeds
1 Tablespoon = 1.75mg



Dried apricots,
10 halves = 1.1mg



Malt-based drink, dry beverage base
20g = 5mg

How much iron per day?

Age	RDI (mg per day)	
Infants	0-6 months	0.2 mg*
	7-12 months	11 mg
Children	1-3 years	9 mg
	4-8 years	10 mg
	9-13 years	8 mg
Men	14-18 years	11 mg
	19-70 years	8 mg
	>70 years	8 mg
Women	14-18 years	15 mg
	19-50 years	18 mg
	50+ years	8 mg
Pregnant	14-50 years	27mg
Lactating	14-18 years	10 mg
	19-50 years	9 mg

These values represent the Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI) values for Australians. Sourced from the Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand (2006).

*Adequate Intake (AI) was used for infants (0-6 months), as an RDI was not available for this age group. Also, iron in infant formula is less well absorbed by the body compared to breast milk (bottle feed infants will need 5 – 10 times this amount).

Vegetarians require 80% more high iron foods to equal iron absorption from meat.

Example of Iron for a day

		mg iron
Breakfast	2 whole-wheat, fortified breakfast biscuits with 1 cup reduced fat milk.	
	1 mandarin	5.2
Morning Tea	130g can of baked beans on 1 slice of wholemeal bread	2.2
Lunch	100g grilled chicken, with spinach garden salad (capsicum, cucumber, tomato, avocado), dressed with fresh lemon juice and olive oil	8.4
Afternoon Tea	200g tub plain yoghurt	
	6 dried apricot halves and 20 raw almonds	1.2
Dinner	100g cooked lean beef	
	2 cups of cooked mixed vegetables (broccoli, carrot, capsicum)	
	1 medium potato, baked	4.7
Minimum total iron intake approx		22.4 mg
Total energy intake approx		7092 kj

Originally produced by the Department of Health, Western Australia, amended with permission by Womens Health & Family Services.

Medical, midwifery, and dietitian appointments are available at WHFS.

See our website for nutrition workshops being held this term.

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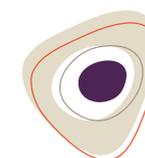
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High Iron Foods



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