

Iron in your diet

Information and advice for patients

Nutrition and Dietetics

What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that is found in a limited number of foods. Iron is needed by our bodies for making healthy red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body.

Why is it important to have enough iron in my diet?

A lack of iron in your diet may cause you to feel tired, lack energy, have a reduced appetite, lack concentration and can result in anaemia.

Vitamin C helps your body to absorb more iron from food so it is also important to include vitamin C containing foods in your diet. See page 4 for more details about vitamin C foods.

How much iron do I need in my diet?

Different groups of people need different amounts of iron in their diet to stay healthy. Those who may be at risk of not having enough iron in their diet include

- Teenage girls
- Women aged between 20 and 49
- Women that are pregnant or breast-feeding
- People who do not eat meat
- Elderly people

Which foods are high in iron?

There are 2 main sources of iron

- Animal sources: red meat, liver, kidney, certain types of fish
- Non-animal sources: beans and pulses, eg. lentils, kidney beans, bread and vegetables.

Getting enough iron in your diet is harder if you do not eat meat. The following information tells you the best sources of iron including non-meat choices suitable for people who do not eat meat.

Excellent sources	Very good sources	Good sources
Try to eat 1 portion of these at least once a week.	Try to eat 1 or 2 portions of these every day, especially if you do not eat any foods from the excellent group.	Try to eat 2 portions of these every day and more if you do not eat meat. These are better absorbed when eaten with foods high in vitamin C.
Liver	Red meat, e.g. beef, lamb, pork, or ham	Bread, bread rolls, chapatti, naan, especially wholemeal and granary

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Liver pâté try chicken pâté if you are not keen on liver pâté -it has a milder flavour than black pudding.	Tongue	Pulse vegetables e.g. Beans, lentils, chick peas
Heart	Canned beef	Canned baked beans in tomato sauce
Faggots	Sardines or mackerel	Eggs
	Fortified breakfast cereals – check the label and choose one with at least 8mg iron per 100g.	Green leafy vegetables, broccoli, cabbage, spinach
		Fruit especially dried fruit e.g. apricots, prunes and raisins

Liver and liver products should not be eaten in pregnancy due to their high vitamin A content, which may harm your baby.

Fortified drinks

Milk and chocolate drinks fortified with iron, such as Milo and Ovaltine, are also good sources of iron (check food label for iron content).

How can I make the iron work better?

Vitamin C in the diet will enable your body to absorb more iron from all your foods. Have at least 1 serving of any 1 of the following at each meal:

- Citrus fruits e.g. oranges, clementines, satsumas, blackcurrants or strawberries
- Fruit juice e.g. orange, mango and blackcurrant
- Green vegetables e.g. broccoli, spinach, peas, spring greens, karela
- Tomatoes or peppers
- Potatoes

Drinks

Make sure you drink 1.5 litres of fluid per day (this is around 6-8 cups or glasses per day). Cold drinks rich in vitamin C are especially good for helping absorption of iron. Hot drinks like tea, coffee and cocoa contain tannins that reduce the absorption of iron from the food. It is best to drink these about an hour after eating, and between meals.

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How do I know if I am having enough iron in my diet?

The iron requirements per day are as follows:

	Age	Amount per day
Females	11-50	14.8mg
	50+	8.7mg
Males	11-18	11.3mg
	19+	8.7mg

You can estimate how much iron you have each day by using the tables below

Iron from animal sources

Meat	Portion size	Amount of iron
Beef (sliced)	45g	1.4mg
Beef (minced)	140g	3.8mg
Corned beef (sliced)	50g	1.2mg
Pork (roast)	90g	1.6mg
Pork (chop)	140g	1mg
Lamb (roast)	90g	1.4mg
Lamb (chop)	70g	1.5mg
Chicken liver	75g	8.5mg
Liver pâté	100g	7mg
Liver sausages	100g	6.5mg
Lambs liver	75g	8mg
Black pudding	50g	10mg
Game	75g	8mg
Beef	100g	3mg
Faggots	150g	12.5mg
Sausages	120g	2mg
Bacon	100g	1.5mg
Ox tongue	50g	1.5mg

Fish	Portion size	Amount of iron
Cockles	100g	26mg
Crab (canned)	100g	3mg
Herring	100g	1mg
Mussels (no shells)	80g	6.5mg

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Pilchards	155g	4.5mg
Prawns (boiled)	100g	1mg
Salmon (steamed)	100g	1mg
Sardines (in tomato sauce)	125g	5mg
Shrimps (canned)	100g	5mg
Tuna (canned in oil)	100g	1.5mg
Whitebait	100g	5mg
Winkles	100g	3mg

Miscellaneous	Portion size	Amount of iron
Bovril	10g	1.5mg
Oxo	1 cube	1.1mg
Egg (no shell)	60g	1.1mg

Iron from non-animal sources

Beans and pulses	Portion size	Amount of iron
Aduki beans	100g	2mg
Baked beans (in tomato sauce)	100g	3mg
Blackeye beans	100g	2mg
Broad beans	100g	1.5mg
Butter beans	100g	1.5mg
Chick peas	100g	2mg
Lentils	100g	3.5mg
Mung beans	100g	1.5mg
Red kidney beans	100g	2.5mg
Soya beans	100g	3mg
Tofu	100g	3.5mg

Fruit and nuts	Portion size	Amount of iron
Dried fruits: prunes, apricots, figs, peaches, currants, raisins, sultanas and dates	50g	1mg
Almonds	33g	1mg
Brazil nuts	40g	1.5mg
Cashew nuts	25g	1.5mg

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Sesame seeds	10g	1mg
Coconut	25g	1mg
Hazelnut	33g	1mg
Peanuts	50g	1mg
Pecans	50g	1mg
Tahini paste	20g	1mg

Vegetables	Portion size	Amount of iron
Broccoli boiled	100g	1mg
Curly Kale	100g	2mg
Karela	100g	1.5mg
Okra canned	100g	5mg
Peas	100g	1.5mg
Spinach	100g	1.5mg
Spring greens	100g	1.5mg
Watercress	100g	2mg

Snacks	Portion size	Amount of iron
Bombay mix	100g	4mg
Trail mix	100g	4mg
Twiglets	100g	3mg

Sweets	Portion size	Amount of iron
Fruit gums	100g	4mg
Liquorice allsorts	100g	8mg
Plain chocolate	100g	2.5mg

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Improvements I could make to my diet after reading this leaflet

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Suggested menu

Breakfast:

- Fruit or fruit juice
- Fortified breakfast cereal or toast

Snack meal:

- Sandwich e.g. tuna, ham, liver pâté or snack on toast e.g. sardines, baked beans
- Vitamin C-enriched squash
- Fruit

Main meal:

- Serving of meat or fish or lentils
- Vegetables
- Potatoes or chapatti
- Fruit e.g. orange

Iron supplements

Iron supplements should only be taken if advised by your GP. Iron supplements can be dangerous if taken in larger doses than recommended.

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Contact details

For more information please contact your dietitian.

Dietitian: _____

Telephone: _____

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition: Iron and Health, 2010
- McCance and Widdowson's 'The Composition of Foods', 6th edition, Food Standards Agency 2002

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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