

Patient Blood Management

Diet and Anaemia: Eating to Best Manage Anaemia

Iron deficient anaemia in adults

What is the best food for iron?

A lack of iron in your diet can contribute to your iron deficiency anaemia. Increasing iron rich foods in your diet can be a simple measure to combating anaemia. Iron-rich foods include:

- White and red meat
- Liver, kidney or products made from these (Please note if you are pregnant do not have liver or liver products)
- Fish (sardines and pilchards are especially good)
- Iron-fortified cereals or bread
- Tofu
- Pulses and beans
- Dark-green leafy vegetables, such as watercress and curly kale
- Brown rice
- Nuts and seeds
- Eggs
- Dried fruit, such as dried apricots, prunes and raisins

You should aim to have three balanced meals a day and try to include foods from all major food groups in your diet, to ensure it is healthy and well-balanced.



Patient Information

For more information visit:

<http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/all-recipes/>

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/iron-rich-vegetarian>

Haem and non-haem iron

There are two forms of iron you can obtain from food, haem and non-haem. Sources of haem iron is from meat protein and sources of non-haem iron is found mainly in enriched cereals and pasta, beans, and dark green leafy vegetables

How can I improve my iron absorption?

Some people are not able to absorb iron from tablets as readily as others. To help with this they may take their tablets with orange juice or vitamin C supplements, as vitamin C increases the absorption of iron. Good sources of vitamin C include fruits and leafy green vegetables. These are at their iron-richest when raw, lightly cooked or steamed. Red meat contains a lot of haem iron and also increases the absorption of non-haem iron. A small portion of lean beef in your stir-fry will work wonders with your iron levels. The secret to absorbing the most iron is the way you put different foods together. For example – a glass of tomato juice with your cereal, or an orange after a bowl of pasta will help your body absorb the iron in the rest of the meal.

What will inhibit my iron absorption?

Some foods, drinks and medications can inhibit iron absorption. These include:

- Red wine
- Antacids and calcium supplements
- Tea
- Coffee
- Cola drinks
- Chocolate
- Unprocessed bran

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You can still eat these foods but it is best to avoid them when eating a meal and have them as occasional snacks in between meals. It is worth noting that calcium prevents your body from absorbing iron effectively. If you take calcium supplements or antacids avoid taking them at the same time as your iron tablets.

Self diagnosis

Taking iron supplements when you feel tired and run down will not help unless you have actually been diagnosed with iron deficiency. There may be another cause for your symptoms. Since iron supplements are available over the counter, it can be tempting to self-diagnose, but this would be a mistake for many reasons, including:

- Fatigue, paleness, dizziness and breathlessness are often symptoms of many other conditions and disorders, not just iron deficiency anaemia. Some of these other conditions are serious. Generally speaking, seeking treatment in the early stages of a disease offers a greater chance of recovery and you may waste valuable time if you self-medicate rather than seeing your doctor.
- The supplements won't alleviate your symptoms if you don't have iron deficiency anaemia.
- Unnecessary iron supplementation can interfere with your body's absorption of other minerals, including zinc and copper.

If you have been diagnosed with anaemia or iron deficiency anaemia it is important that you are monitored by your GP. This can be done by having regular blood tests.

What are the risks?

Doses of iron prescribed for iron deficiency anaemia in adults may cause constipation, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, especially if supplements are taken on an empty stomach. If iron tablets are irritating your stomach your doctor might advise taking them with food. Or you might ask you to try a different type of iron tablet or a liquid supplement. If you have any concerns or you think you have taken too much iron contact your GP or dial 111 for advice.

Patient Information

Keep out of reach of children

Iron overdose occurs when you take an excessive amount of supplements that contain iron. Iron is toxic in large amounts and can be fatal at high doses. Children are especially at risk as they can mistake the red tablets for sweets. **Iron supplements must be stored away from children's reach.**

Please keep this sheet for your own records:

Date: _____

If you require any further information about anaemia and diet please contact the Patient Blood Management Practitioner on 024 7696 6911 or the Hospital Transfusion Team by ringing 024 7696 4000 extension 25469 or 25470. Or ask your GP or specialist nurse for a referral to a dietician.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please ask and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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