

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

How to increase your iron intake

Introduction

A poor iron intake in your diet can lead to iron-deficiency anaemia which means that your red blood cells can't carry enough oxygen around the body. As a result, you may feel tired, dizzy or a little breathless. Diet can play an important role in preventing and treating anaemia. This leaflet gives advice on how to increase your iron intake.

Which foods are rich in iron?

Foods with the richest source of iron are from animal sources but some plant foods are also good sources. Iron in animal foods is absorbed more easily than iron from plant foods.

If you eat meat, try to include a small serving most days of one the following:

- Liver, kidney or products made from these. Please note if you are pregnant, **do not** have liver or liver products (see page 3).
- Meat, especially red meat
- Corned beef, tongue
- Sardines & pilchards are also a good source of iron



Eating meat & balancing health risks:

Meat products such as black pudding, faggots, pate and sausages also contain iron, but are also high in fat, so have these less often.

In order to reduce the risk of bowel cancer it is recommended that you limit your intake of red & processed meat to 70g per day. For more information (including portion size limits) see NHS Choices website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/meat.aspx>

If you do not eat meat try to include at least one or more of these iron-containing foods each day

- Breakfast cereals with added iron;
- Bread – particularly wholemeal;
- Fortified flour- particularly wholemeal;



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- Beans, peas, lentils, dahls;
- Soya beans, tofu;
- Green leafy vegetables;
- Eggs;
- Dried fruit;
- Nuts & seeds;

Other foods which contain iron include chocolate, fruit gums, liquorice & treacle. As these contain a lot of sugar you are advised to only include these occasionally.

How can I make the most of the iron in my diet?

The iron found in plant foods is less well absorbed than the iron in meat. Vitamin C helps us absorb more iron from our food. Having a food or drink which is rich in vitamin C at mealtimes will increase the amount of iron we absorb from that meal.

Vitamin C is found in the following:

- Blackcurrants
- Fruit juice (no more than one glass per day with a meal)
- Citrus fruits e.g. oranges
- Vegetables
- Salad
- Cordials with added vitamin C *
pick sugar free if diabetic and/or trying to lose weight



Meal Ideas:

Breakfast

- Fortified breakfast cereal & milk, wholemeal toast with orange juice
- Beans on toast with a glass of fruit juice
- Fruit & nut based breakfast cereal with a glass of fruit juice

Lunch

- Lentil soup, wholemeal bread & fruit
- Sardines on wholemeal toast with salad & fruit
- Slice of pizza & side salad & fruit salad

Main meal

- Chilli con carne & vegetables
- Omelette & side salad
- Pilchards, rice & vegetables
- Lentil curry, wholemeal chapattis & salad

General tips about iron

- If you are pregnant, do not eat liver or liver products such as pate. They contain large amounts of vitamin A which may be harmful to your baby.
- If you are vegetarian include non-meat iron-rich foods daily (see page 1).
- Remember, include foods rich in vitamin C at meal times.

Patient Information

- Hot drinks such as tea & coffee can reduce your iron absorption – have these at least one hour after eating a meal.

Further Information

If you would like further information or have any other questions, please contact the Dietitians on Telephone 024 7696 6161.

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