



IRON CONTENT IN FOOD

Iron is a vital mineral necessary for health. Too little iron can cause iron deficiency. Iron deficiency can lead to anemia, which is defined by having too few red blood cells, our body's oxygen carriers. Symptoms of iron-deficiency anemia may include fatigue and pica (eating non-food items such as soil or sand). Anemia is fairly common in children and teens.

We need more iron when we are growing. Premature infants also have higher iron needs. Menstruating women need more iron. Too much iron can harm our livers.

Daily iron requirements by age and sex:

AGE	Male	Female
0-6 months	<1 mg *	<1 mg*
7-12 months	11 mg	11 mg
1-3 years	7 mg	7 mg
4-8 years	10 mg	10 mg
9-13 years	8 mg	8 mg
14-18 years	11 mg	15 mg
19-50 years	8 mg	18 mg

*Please note that infants who are not breastfed should receive iron-containing formula.

There are two types of dietary iron:

HEME IRON:

- comes from animal sources, such as beef, pork, lamb, fish, chicken, turkey.
- is more easily absorbed than non-heme iron.

NON-HEME IRON:

- comes from fortified grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables.
- absorbs about half as well as heme iron, so you need to eat about 2 mg of non-heme iron to equal 1 mg of heme iron.

Ways to increase iron intake and absorption:

- Eat iron-rich foods with vitamin C-rich foods. This aids absorption. If you are taking an iron supplement, it will absorb better if given with orange juice. If you are eating an iron-fortified pasta or meat sauce, it will absorb better with tomato sauce.
- Avoid eating large amounts of calcium-rich foods with iron-containing foods. If you are taking an iron supplement and a calcium supplement, they should be taken at different times of day.
- Coffee and tea may decrease absorption of iron.
- Use a cast iron skillet for cooking.
- Use blackstrap molasses in baked goods.
- Look for iron-fortified breakfast cereals. Total™, Quaker Quick Oats with Iron™, Trader Joe's Organic High Fiber O's™ and Kix™ are some brands that contain higher amount of iron.



HEME IRON	MG IRON
Oysters, 3 oz	4
Beef, 3 oz	2
Chicken, 3 oz	1
Pork/ham, 3 oz	1
Salmon, 3 oz	1
Tuna, 3 oz	1
Egg, one large	1

These are estimated values.

Some plant-based foods that are good sources of iron, such as spinach, have low iron bioavailability because they contain iron-absorption inhibitors, such as polyphenols.

NON-HEME IRON	MG IRON
Fortified cereal, 1 serving	5-18
White beans, canned, 1 c	8
Chocolate, dark, 45-69% cacao solids, 3 oz	7
Lentils, cooked, 1/2 c	3
Spinach, cooked, 1/2 c	3
Tofu, firm, 4 oz	3
Kidney beans, canned, 1/2 c	2
Garbanzo beans, canned, 1/2 c	2
Tomatoes, canned, 1/2 c	2
Baked potato w skin, 1 medium	2
Cashew nuts, 1 oz	2
Green peas, boiled, 1/2 c	1
Rice, enriched, 1/2 c	1
Bread, 1 slice	1
Raisins, 1/4 c	1
Spaghetti, whole wheat, 1 c	1
Pistachio nuts, 1 oz	1

NON-HEME IRON	MG IRON
Broccoli, cooked, 1/2 c	1
Blackstrap molasses, 1 T	1
Watermelon, 1 slice	0.7