

Iron

by Blackpool Teaching Hospitals - Tuesday, January 10, 2012

Iron is an essential nutrient in our food. We need iron to grow and develop normally. Iron is necessary to maintain levels of haemoglobin, the red pigment in blood. What happens if we eat too much? If we do not have enough iron in the foods we eat, we can develop anaemia which makes us tired and weak.

Who is at risk of developing anaemia?

Everyone! Some people are more at risk, such as:

- Infants
- Toddlers
- Adolescents
- Pregnant women
- The Elderly
- Vegetarians and vegans

How can I reduce my risk of developing anaemia?

- Eat a healthy diet and do not miss meals. Have at least 3 meals a day including breakfast.
- Eat foods rich in iron.
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables—the vitamin C helps our bodies absorb the iron we eat. Have a vitamin C source with every meal, for example fruit juice, vegetables, fruit for dessert, vitamin C enriched squash.
- Avoid drinking tea with meals as this affects the amount of iron absorbed. Drink water, fruit juices or milk instead.
- Use wholemeal breads and cereals instead of adding unprocessed bran to your food. Added bran may prevent iron absorption. If you are planning to become pregnant or are pregnant.

Pregnancy does not increase your iron requirement. However, make sure you achieve your daily iron requirement intake. During pregnancy avoid liver and liver products, for example liver sausages and pâté, and undercooked eggs.

How much daily iron do we need?

The Department of Health recommends the following daily iron intake:

Age	Daily iron requirement (mg)	Age	Daily iron requirement (mg)
0-3 months	1.7	7-10 years	8.7
4-6 months	4.3	Boys 11-18 years	11.3
7-12 months	7.8	Females 11-49 years	14.8
1-3 years	6.9	Men 19+ years	8.7
4-6 years	6.1	Women 50+ years	8.7

Look at the following chart. These foods are good sources of iron. Use the chart to work out how to get enough iron for your daily requirements.

If you are on any medication please check with your doctor if you are unsure what levels of iron you may need for your health and well being.

Common foods high in iron

Food	Amount of iron (mg)	Food	Amount of iron (mg)
2 slices of lambs liver	8.0	1 medium jacket potato	1.3
Average bowl of bran flakes	8.0	3 tablespoons of red or black dahl	1.3
Average portion of meat curry	6.7	2 heaped teaspoons of cocoa	1.3
Average portion of stewed beef	6.2	1 boiled / poached egg	1.3
Average portion of rump steak	4.0	1 beef burger	1.2
Average portion of cottage pie	3.6	1 sardine (tinned, in tomato sauce)	1.2
Average portion of lasagne	3.2	2 tablespoons of hummus	1.1
1 small tin of baked beans	3.2	Medium chicken breast	1.0
2 weetabix	3.0	Medium portion of garden peas	1.0
Average portion of cornflakes	2.7	Average portion of broccoli	1.0
3 tablespoons of muesli	2.6	1 medium slice of wholemeal bread	0.9
2 large pork sausages, grilled	1.8	2 chicken drumsticks	0.9
1 medium kipper	1.8	1 tablespoon of dried fruit	0.9
2 shredded wheat	1.8	1 tbsp of cooked red kidney beans	0.8
1 lamb chop	1.7	2 rashers of lean back bacon	0.8
1 thick slice of corned beef	1.5	1 medium slice of brown bread	0.7
1 pork chop	1.4	Average portion of tuna for a sandwich	0.7
Average portion of spinach	1.4	1 medium slice of white bread	0.5
1 chapatti	1.4	2 fish fingers, grilled	0.4

The Department of Nutrition and Dietetics accepts no responsibility for inappropriate use of this information. If in doubt, please check the label.