

# Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services



## Pumping up your iron

Iron is a mineral that has many important roles for good health including:

- Developing new cells
- Carrying oxygen to cells, including muscle cells

Not enough iron in the diet can lead to iron deficiency or anaemia.

A common cause of iron deficiency is eating a diet low in iron. Symptoms of iron deficiency may include:

- Decreased immunity
- Difficulty maintaining body temperature
- Fast heartbeat
- Feeling tired and weak
- Inflamed tongue (glossitis)
- Paleness
- Poor school or work performance

### How much iron do you need?

Age (years)	Amount of iron per day (mg)		Amount of iron per day for vegetarians (mg)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
14-18	11	15	20	27
19-50	8	18	14	32
Over 50	8	8	14	14
<b>Pregnancy</b>				
14-50	27		49	
<b>Lactation</b>				
14-18	10		18	
19-50	9		16	

### Types of iron found in food

There are two types of iron:

- **Heme** - found only in animal products like beef, pork, chicken and fish, is the easiest form of iron for the body to absorb
- **Non-heme** - found in animal products as well as vegetables, whole and enriched grains, legumes, dried fruit, nuts and iron in supplements, is not as easy for the body to absorb

Vegetarians, meaning those who avoid meat such as beef, poultry, fish and seafood, need more iron from their diet since their iron sources are not as easily absorbed (non-heme)

### Ways to increase iron absorption from foods

- Eat meat, poultry or fish (heme iron) with vegetables or grains (non-heme iron). Heme iron helps the body absorb non-heme iron
- Eat foods that have vitamin C, such as strawberries, oranges, 100% fruit juice, broccoli, tomatoes and red or green peppers, with iron-containing foods. Vitamin C helps the body absorb non-heme iron
- Coffee and tea lower the absorption of non-heme-iron so if you drink these beverages with your meals, include meat or a source of vitamin C

### Ideas to get more iron in your diet

- Use legumes (e.g., beans and lentils) in casseroles, soups, stews and salads
- Choose enriched breads, pastas and cereals

- Choose tomato and meat sauces instead of cream sauces
- Sprinkle wheat germ on cereals or add it to meatloaf, hamburgers, muffins, squares, pancakes and waffles
- Add dried fruits, such as apricots and raisins to cereals and baked goods
- Cook foods in an iron skillet or wok
- Try to include a meat or alternative at most meals
- Include iron-rich foods in your diet (see the chart “Iron content of some common foods”)

## Understanding Percent Daily Values (% DV)

When you read a food label, you will see the % DV on the Nutrition Facts Label. This number is there to help you know if a food has a lot or a little nutrient per serving. It can also help when comparing one package to another. Remember the following:

- More than 5% DV – Has at least 0.7 mg of iron per serving and is considered a source of iron
- More than 15% DV – Has at least 2.1 mg of iron and is considered a good source of iron
- More than 25% DV – Has at least 3.5 mg of iron and is considered a very good or excellent source of iron

Note: 100% DV = 14 mg of iron

## Do you need an iron supplement?

If you think you should take an iron supplement, talk to a doctor. A blood test can see if your iron levels are in the recommended range. Always talk to your doctor before taking any type of supplement.

If your doctor recommends an iron supplement, follow the dosage instructions carefully to help reduce side effects such as nausea, constipation and stomach upset. Keep the supplement in a safe location, away from children because iron poisoning can lead to accidental death.

For more information about your iron needs, talk to a registered dietitian at EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102.

Iron content of some common foods		
Food	Serving size	mg iron
<b>Meat (heme iron) and Alternatives (non-heme iron)</b>		
Clams, mixed species	5 large	16.8
Liver, chicken	2 ½ oz (75 g)	9.7
Pumpkin seeds	¼ cup (60 mL)	5.2
Lentils	¾ cup (175 mL)	4.9
Vegetable patty	1 (90 g)	3.9
Baked beans with pork	¾ cup (175 mL)	3.2
Sardines, with bones	1 can	3.1
Beef, ground	2 ½ oz (75 g)	2.1
Scallops	6 medium	2.3
Beans, kidney	¾ cup (175 mL)	2.4
Chickpeas	¾ cup (175 mL)	2.4
Tofu	¾ cup (150 g)	2.4
Turkey, dark meat	2 ½ oz (75 g)	1.7
Lamb	2 ½ oz (75 g)	1.6
Almonds	¼ cup (60 mL)	1.5
Eggs	2	1.4
Tuna, light, canned	2 ½ oz (75 g)	1.1
Chicken, dark meat	2 ½ oz (75 g)	1.0
Pork tenderloin	2 ½ oz (75 g)	1.0
<b>Grain Products (non-heme iron)</b>		
Iron-fortified cereals (look at the % DV)	1 oz (30 g)	Up to 14
Oatmeal, instant	1 packet	4.0
Naan	½	2.3
Quinoa, cooked	½ cup (125 mL)	1.7
Cream of Wheat®	¾ cup (175 mL)	1.6
White or whole wheat bread (enriched)	1 slice	1.2
Spaghetti, cooked	½ cup (125 mL)	1.1
Wheat germ	1 Tbsp (15 mL)	0.7
<b>Vegetables and Fruit (non-heme iron)</b>		
Spinach, boiled, drained	½ cup (125 mL)	3.4
Potato with skin, baked	1	1.9
Edamame	½ cup (125 mL)	1.9
Pumpkin, canned	½ cup (125 mL)	1.8
Prune juice	½ cup (125 mL)	1.6
Apricots, dried	3	1.3
Raisins	1/4 cup (60 mL)	0.7

Source: Health Canada, *Nutrient value of some common foods*, 2008