



High Iron Diet

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team about specific care for your child.

Why is iron needed?

The body needs iron to make red blood cells. Without enough iron, your child may seem tired, cranky, pale, weak and sensitive to cold and hot temperatures. It can also affect how the brain and muscles work.

How much iron does my child need?

Age Group	Age	Amount Recommended Each Day
Babies	7-12 months	11mg
Toddlers	1-3 years	7mg
Young Children	4-8 years	10mg
Older Children	9-13 years	8mg
Teens	14-18 years	Boys - 11mg Girls - 15mg
Adults	19-50 years	Men - 8mg Women - 18mg

What types of foods contain iron?

Babies: Iron is in breast milk and iron-fortified infant formula. These should be the only kinds of milk you give to your baby until he is 1 year old. Wait until your child's 1 year birthday before you give him any regular cow's milk. Give iron-enriched cereals at 6 months of age.

Toddlers: Drinking too much cow's milk may keep your toddler from eating enough food, including foods that have lots of iron. Limit milk intake to no more than 2-3 cups per day and offer 5-6 small meals that include foods high in iron (see the list below except dried fruits and nuts due to risk of choking).

Older children: Serve several high-iron foods each day. High-iron foods include:

- Meat and fish, especially liver, beef, dark meat chicken and turkey, pork, tuna, shrimp, salmon and mackerel.
- Iron-fortified cereals such as Total, Life, Wheaties, Crispix, Kix, Honeybunches of Oats, Rice Chex, Corn Chex, Rasin Bran, Branflakes, instant oatmeal and enriched grits and cereal bars.
- Dried beans and peas such as pinto beans, navy beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, chickpeas.
- Vegetables such as green leafy vegetables like kale, collard greens, spinach and bok choy, broccoli, pumpkin, green beans, peas, lima beans, white and sweet potatoes.
- Whole grain products enriched with iron such as wheat and white bread, pasta, English muffins, whole wheat pita bread and brown rice.
- Dried fruits.
- Soy foods such as soybeans, soy milk, tofu, soy burger, tempeh.
- Nuts and seeds such as peanuts, almonds, cashews, pumpkin and sunflower seeds. Do not give nuts to children under 3 years old due to the risk of choking.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

High Iron Diet, continued

What types of foods can help my child absorb iron better?

Iron is most easily absorbed from meats.

- It is also absorbed better from foods naturally rich in iron than from iron-fortified products.
- Vitamin C helps the body absorb more iron, so offer iron-rich foods with foods high in Vitamin C which include:
 - Citrus fruits and juices such as oranges, grapefruit, tangerines
 - Strawberries
 - Tomatoes
 - Salad greens
 - Melons (cantaloupe, honeydew)
 - Cabbage
 - Broccoli
 - Brussels sprouts
 - Cauliflower
 - Berries
 - Peppers
 - Potatoes

The chart below provides some examples of meals you can fix for your child that are high in iron, compared with low-iron meals.

	High-iron meals	Low-iron meals
Breakfast	¾ cup Wheaties ½ cup orange juice 1 cup whole milk	1 English muffin ½ banana 1 cup yogurt
Lunch	1 cup black bean soup ½ cup tuna salad ½ cup strawberries 1 cup raw broccoli spears Ranch dressing dip	1 cup vegetable soup 12 saltine crackers Apple
Snack	Box of raisins Rice Krispie snack bar Kellogg's Nutri-grain bar	Celery sticks with peanut butter
Dinner	Hamburger 2 tangerines Tossed salad Italian dressing	Chicken taco ½ cup rice ½ cup steamed carrots Pear

Should my child take an iron supplement?

Give your child an iron supplement only if your child's doctor advises it.

- If you do give your child an iron supplement, always make sure you give it to your child with fruit or fruit juice.
- If taking it upsets your child's stomach, make sure he takes it with food.
- Do not give your child the iron supplement with milk since milk prevents it from being absorbed.

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