

Increasing Iron in Your Diet

Why should I include more iron in my diet?

You need iron in your body to carry oxygen in your blood. If you don't include enough iron in your diet, you can develop iron-deficiency anemia. Growing children, adolescents, and menstruating and pregnant women need more iron. You may also need more iron during illness or after surgery to help you recover.

Dietitian name
Phone number



AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- The best way to ensure you are getting enough iron is to eat a well-balanced diet—one that includes breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products.
- There are two types of iron in foods—heme and nonheme. Meat, poultry, and fish contain heme iron, which is much more easily absorbed by the body than nonheme iron. Nonheme iron is found mainly in plant foods, such as breads and vegetables. Absorption of nonheme iron is enhanced when plant sources of iron are eaten with meats or with vitamin C-containing foods.
- Some foods hinder absorption of iron. When eating iron-rich foods, go easy on coffee and tea (decaf and regular) and bran.
- If you need an iron supplement, ask your doctor what kind to take and when to take it.

NOTES:

SAMPLE MENU FOR A HIGH-IRON DIET

BREAKFAST

Orange juice[‡] (¼ cup)
Iron-fortified cereal[†] (½ cup)
with raisins[‡]
Whole-grain toast[‡] (2 slices)
with margarine (2 tsp)
and jam (1 tbsp)
Milk (1 cup)

LUNCH

Black bean soup[‡] (1 cup)
Hamburger* (3 oz) on a
toasted bun (1) with
sliced tomato[‡], onion,
and lettuce
Cantaloupe[‡] (½ cup)
Ice water

SNACK

Trail mix[‡]: raisins (1 tbsp) peanuts
(½ oz), sunflower seeds (½ oz),
and chopped dried apricots (1)
Cranberry juice cocktail[‡] (½ cup)

DINNER

Tossed salad (1 cup) with
vinegar-and-oil dressing
Herbed, savory baked
chicken* (3 oz)
Baked potato with the skin[‡]
with margarine (1 tsp)
Steamed broccoli[‡] (1 cup)
Whole-grain roll[‡] (1) with
molasses[‡]
Low-fat frozen yogurt with
fresh strawberries[‡]
(½ cup)
Milk (1 cup)

- * Source of heme iron
- † Source of nonheme iron
- ‡ Source of vitamin C

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Food Categories	Foods Recommended	Tips
BREADS, CEREALS, RICE, AND PASTA 6–11 servings each day		
Serving size = 1 slice bread, 1 oz ready-to-eat cereal, ½ cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta; ½ bun, bagel, or English muffin; 1 small roll, biscuit, or muffin; 3–4 small or 2 large crackers; 1 6-inch tortilla	All In particular: iron-fortified whole-grain breads, pastas, rice, and cereals	Scan food labels. Look for breads and cereals that contain 20% or more of the Daily Value (DV) for iron. “Rev” up the iron potential of pasta by serving enriched noodles with tomato sauce (a good source of vitamin C).
VEGETABLES 3–5 servings each day		
Serving size = 1 cup cooked or chopped raw, 1 cup raw leafy, ½ cup juice	All In particular: leafy greens, such as broccoli, spinach, kale, turnip greens, and collards; potato with the skin; lima beans and green peas	Remember to eat the skin on baked potatoes. Add spinach and other leafy green vegetables to soups, stews, and casseroles.
FRUITS 2–4 servings each day		
Serving size = 1 medium, ¼ melon wedge, ½ cup chopped, cooked, or canned, ¾ cup juice, ¼ cup dried	All In particular: apricots (dried, canned), figs, raisins, prunes, and prune juice	Eat a vitamin C-rich fruit or vegetable at each meal to enhance iron absorption from other foods. Good sources of vitamin C include citrus fruits, broccoli, tomatoes, and green pepper. Snack on trail mixes of dried apricots, raisins, figs, and nuts.
MILK, YOGURT, AND CHEESE 2–3 servings each day		
Serving size = 1 cup milk or yogurt, 1½ oz natural cheese, 2 oz processed cheese	All	Foods in this group provide very little iron but are an important part of a healthful diet. Add dried fruits and nuts to yogurt and shakes to boost iron.
MEATS, POULTRY, FISH, DRIED BEANS AND PEAS, EGGS, AND NUTS 2–3 servings or total of 6 oz daily		
Serving size = 2–3 oz cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish; count 1 egg, ½ cup cooked dried beans, 2 tbsp peanut butter, or ½ cup nuts as 1 oz of meat	All meat, poultry, fish All beans, peas, nuts, and seeds Eggs	Meats, poultry (especially dark meat), clams, and oysters are good sources of iron. Stir-fry meat with vegetables. Meat, fish, and poultry have a special quality that increases iron absorption in vegetables and other nonmeat sources. “Load up” soup and chili with lots of dried beans and peas.
FATS, SNACKS, SWEETS, CONDIMENTS, AND BEVERAGES		
Use sparingly	Blackstrap molasses	Drink coffee or tea between meals rather than with meals.