

Staying Healthy

The Importance of Iron

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Why is iron important?

Iron is a mineral that carries oxygen to your cells, which then produce energy. When your iron is low, your energy is low and you feel tired. It can also result in anemia. Iron is important for growth and development, and deficiencies can lead to learning and behavioral problems in young children.

Who is more likely to develop an iron deficiency?

- Babies born prematurely or those with low-birth weight.
- Babies exclusively breastfed after 4 months; human milk contains very little iron.
- Toddlers who drink a lot of cow's milk. More than 24 ounces per day can cause them to not eat enough iron-rich foods.
- Teen girls who experience heavy periods, or those who playing a lot of sports.
- Children who are vegetarian; iron from plants is not as easily absorbed as iron from meat.

Tips to help your body better absorb iron from food and supplements

Eating foods high in vitamin C—such as citrus, peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, or strawberries—with your meal can help improve iron absorption.

When grocery shopping, choose grains like bread, crackers, and cereals that are enriched or fortified with iron. Check labels and look for 25% or higher for the daily value (DV) for iron.

Plan ahead and eat iron-rich foods or take iron supplements 1 hour before or after calcium-rich foods. Calcium can block the iron absorption in the body. Calcium-rich foods include dairy products, tofu, and fortified calcium products.

Use cast iron pots and pans for cooking to help add iron to foods. Or, use a product like Lucky Iron Fish when boiling water or food (for details, go to luckyironfish.com).

If your child does not like the taste of iron supplements, mix it with lemon or chocolate-flavored food or drinks to mask the metallic taste. Older children can drink it through a straw. Better-tasting liquid supplements are available, like NovaFerrum.

Liquid iron supplements can stain teeth. Wipe a toddler's teeth with washcloth and have older children brush their teeth after taking iron supplements.

See reverse side for more information on iron-containing foods.

Kaiser Permanente Colorado Nutrition Services is dedicated to helping both Kaiser Permanente members and community members improve their overall health through evidenced-based nutrition education and counseling.

How much iron do children need?

Milligrams (mg) per day

Babies and children (7 months-13 years)

Teenagers (14-18 years)

Female

7-11 mg

15 mg

Male

7-11 mg

11 mg

Iron-containing foods

Iron is listed on the food label as a percent of total daily value for an adult, which is 18mg per day.

To determine how many mg of iron that is in a product, multiply by the percent by 18. For example, a food that contains 25% iron would be calculated $18 \times .25 = 4.5$ mg of iron per serving.

HIGH in iron	Serving	Iron per serving
Any cereal fortified with 100% RDA	1 ounce	18 mg
Oatmeal, plain, fortified	1 packet	10 mg
Cream of wheat, Malt o meal	1 cup	10 mg
Cheerios	1 cup	9 mg
Lentils, cooked	½ cup	3.3 mg
Quinoa	½ cup	7.7 mg
Tofu	½ cup	6.6 mg
Instant breakfast	1 packet	4.5 mg
Pumpkin seeds	1 ounce	4.2 mg
MODERATE in iron	Serving	Iron per serving
Dark leafy vegetables	1 cup	3.8 mg
Spinach, frozen	1 cup	3.7 mg
Beans	½ cup	3.2 mg
Beef, cooked	3 ounces	3.0 mg
Prune juice	8 ounces	3.0 mg
Almonds	½ cup	2.6 mg