

# Iron

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Iron is a mineral that helps carry oxygen in your blood. It is important for brain function, learning, and motor skills.

## Iron-Deficiency Anemia

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If you have iron-deficiency anemia, you don't have enough iron in your blood. You may feel tired or have trouble breathing. Anemia may be related to cancer or cancer treatments, or it may have other causes.

Treatment for iron-deficiency anemia may include eating more foods rich in iron and/or taking a supplement with iron. Follow the plan provided by your doctor or registered dietitian (RD).

## How Much Iron Do I Need?

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The amount of iron you need to get from food, and possibly supplements, depends on your age and sex. Use the following chart to learn daily iron goals for most healthy teens and adults. Your doctor or RD will tell you what goal is right for you.

## Daily Iron Recommendations in Milligrams (mg)

Age	Males	Females
14–18 years	11 mg	15 mg
19–30 years	8 mg	18 mg
31–50 years	8 mg	18 mg
51+ years	8 mg	8 mg

## What Factors Affect Iron Absorption?

Our bodies do not absorb all the iron in the foods we eat. The amount of iron your body absorbs depends on several factors:

- If your iron levels are low, your body will absorb more iron from the foods you eat.
- If your iron levels are good, your body will absorb less iron from the foods you eat.
- Our bodies absorb **heme iron**, the form of iron in foods from animals (meat, seafood, and poultry), more easily than **nonheme iron**, the form of iron in plant-based foods such as beans, peas, and some vegetables.
- When you eat foods with nonheme iron along with foods that contain vitamin C or with meats, more of the nonheme iron is absorbed.
- Calcium supplements can prevent some iron absorption.
- Certain substances in tea (tannins, polyphenols, and phytates) can also decrease iron absorption.

## What Do I Need to Know About Iron Supplements?

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- Do not take iron supplements unless you are advised to do so by your health care team. Too much iron can be harmful.
- If your health care team prescribes iron supplements for you, take them as ordered.
- Iron is absorbed best on an empty stomach, so try taking iron supplements this way first.
- If an iron supplement upsets your stomach, take it with meals or immediately after a meal.
- If you continue to have stomach upset, ask your health care team whether you can take a lower dose of iron and then slowly increase the amount you take.
- Iron may cause stools to be darker in color.
- Talk to your doctor about any side effects you may experience.

# Which Foods Provide Iron?

Use the following charts to help you plan meals and snacks that are rich in iron.

## Meats, Seafood, and Poultry

Food	Serving Size	Amount of Iron
Chicken liver, cooked	3 ounces	7 milligrams (mg)
Oysters, breaded and fried	6 oysters	4.5 mg
Beef, chuck, braised	3 ounces	3.2 mg
Clams, breaded, fried	¾ cup	3 mg
Beef, tenderloin, roasted	3 ounces	3 mg
Turkey, dark meat, roasted	3 ounces	2 mg
Beef, eye of round, roasted	3 ounces	1.7 mg
Turkey, light meat, roasted	3 ounces	1.2 mg
Tuna, fresh, cooked	3 ounces	1.1 mg
Chicken leg, roasted	3 ounces (meat only)	1.1 mg
Crab, cooked	1 cup flaked pieces	1.1 mg
Chicken breast, roasted	3 ounces	1 mg
Halibut, cooked	3 ounces	0.9 mg
Pork loin, broiled	3 ounces	0.8 mg
White tuna, canned in water	3 ounces	0.8 mg
Shrimp, cooked	4 large	0.7 mg

## Plant-based Foods

Food	Serving Size	Amount of Iron
Iron-fortified ready-to-eat cereal	¾ cup	9–18 milligrams (mg)
Soybeans, cooked	1 cup	8 mg
Lentils, cooked	1 cup	6 mg
Enriched instant grits	1 packet	5.4 mg
Iron-fortified instant oatmeal	½ cup	4.1 mg
Kidney beans, cooked	1 cup	5.2 mg
Pinto beans, cooked	1 cup	4.6 mg
Lima beans, cooked	1 cup	4.2 mg
Navy beans, cooked	1 cup	3.8 mg
Black beans, cooked	1 cup	3.6 mg
Tofu, firm	½ cup	1.8 mg
Black-eyed-peas, cooked	1 cup	1.8 mg
Spinach, cooked	½ cup	1.4–3.2 mg
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	0.9 mg
Molasses	1 tablespoon	0.9 mg
Enriched white bread	1 slice	0.8 mg
Raisins	50	0.5 mg