



# The Importance of Iron

Iron requirements for women are around 80% higher than those for men because of menstruation and child-bearing. More than half of all women consume less than the recommended 18 mg daily. Those most likely to develop iron deficiency include:

- Pregnant women
- Frequent/restrictive dieters
- Women with heavy periods
- Children
- People with low gastric acid levels
- People with digestive issues/parasitic infections

## Iron deficiency

Iron is used in the body to transport oxygen around the body, improve immune resilience, support bone homeostasis, thyroid function, DNA & neurotransmitter synthesis as well as skin & nail formation. Iron is stored in the body as ferritin in places other than the red blood cells. These include the liver, bone marrow, spleen and muscles. A true test for anaemia will test if there is a depletion of iron in the red blood cells (the haemoglobin level), and in the organ stores elsewhere in the body (the ferritin level). Iron deficiency causes the symptoms described below and should respond to a low dose iron supplement. Always seek advice and ask for a blood test before beginning supplementation. Iron should not be taken unnecessarily as it will accumulate in the body and may become toxic.

## Symptoms of low iron levels

- Poor stamina
- A red sore tongue & paleness under the bottom eyelid
- Reduced resistance to infection
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Concave fingernails

## Recommended daily intakes

Children 1-8	Adolescences 9-18	Male adults 19-70+	Females adults 19-50	Female adults 51-70+
9-10mg/day	8-15mg/day (highest intake needed by female teenagers)	8mg/day	18mg/day (Pregnant females - 27mg/day)	8mg/day

## Improving iron absorption

Apart from increasing the intake of iron-rich foods, there are a number of other ways to increase iron levels;

- Eat Vitamin C rich foods with foods high in iron
- Add acidic dressings, such as lemon and vinegar, to iron rich foods
- Eat bitter green vegetables or fruit before or during the meal to increase the flow of gastric acid, which will in turn improve absorption of minerals. Alcoholic aperitifs, grapefruit, and bitter green vegetables can all be used.
- Avoid tea (especially black tea) and coffee until the iron deficiency improves. The tannin in tea binds with iron making it difficult to absorb. Coffee also reduces absorption, especially if taken after a meal. Don't take iron tablets with tea or coffee.

**Sources of Iron** – Recommended Daily Intake for menstruating women is 18 mg / day (30mg in pregnancy)

Animal Sources	mg/100g	Grains	mg/100g	Beans and Vegetables	mg/100g	Fruits	mg/100g	Other	mg/100g
Beef liver	11.0	Wheat germ	10.0	Haricot beans	2.5	Apricots fresh	0.4	Almonds	4.2
Eggs	2.1	Wheat bran	12.9	Broccoli tops	1.0	Apricots dried	4.1	Brazil nuts	2.9
Lean beef	2.7	Raw oatmeal	4.1	Leeks	2.0	Avocado	1.5	Hazelnuts	1.1
Lean lamb	3.7	Soya flour	9.1	Lentils	5.4	Currants	1.8	Peanuts	2.0
Lean pork	1.3	White bread	1.7	Lettuce	0.9	Figs, dried	4.2	Walnuts	2.4
Chicken	1.9	Brown bread	2.5	Mushrooms	1.0	Dates	1.6	Cashews	5.0
Cod/Salmon	0.4	Rye biscuits	3.7	Spring onions	1.2	Peaches, dried	6.8		
Sardines	6.1			Parsley. Raw	9.5	Prunes	8.0		
Mussels	2.9			Peas	1.2	Raisins	1.6		
Oysters	4.1			English Spinach	3.2	Raspberries	1.2		

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