



Optimising Dietary Iron

Iron is an essential mineral that forms part of important proteins such as the haemoglobin molecule and is an important enzyme co-factor. Iron is involved in the transport of oxygen around the body, and when iron stores are depleted it may result in fatigue, lethargy, poor childhood growth, adverse pregnancy outcomes and compromised immune status. Iron may also require the presence of other nutrients, such as Vitamin C and citric acid, to increase its absorption. Iron's absorption and maintenance status may also be compromised by some health conditions, biological sex and life-stages.

Recommended Daily Intakes:

Child 1-13 years – 11mg/day

Boys 14-18 years – 11mg/day

Girls 14-18 years – 15mg/day

Male 19yrs+ - 8mg/day

Females 19-50 yrs – 18mg/day

Pregnant women – 27mg/day

Females 50+ yrs – 8mg/day

There are two types of iron found in food: haem and non-haem. Haem iron is found in animal products including red meat, poultry and seafood. The other type of iron is non-haem iron which is found in plant-based foods and eggs.

Animal-based sources of iron

- Red meat (beef, lamb, veal, pork, kangaroo)
- Offal (liver, kidney, pate)
- Poultry (chicken, turkey, game birds)
- Fish or shellfish (salmon, sardines, tuna, anchovy)
- Eggs (non-haem iron)

Plant-based sources of iron

The type of iron found in plant-based products is not as easy to absorb as animal (haem) based Iron, but can still contribute to an adequate dietary iron intake.

- Nuts and seeds (tahini, sunflower, almonds)
- Dried fruit (prunes, dates, apricot, apple, fig)
- Wholemeal pasta and bread

- Wholegrains (quinoa, oats, buckwheat, amaranth)
- Iron-fortified bread and cereals
- Legumes (mixed, broad, red kidney, baked, lentils and chickpeas)
- Dark leafy vegetables (bok choy, kale, green peas, spinach, silverbeet, broccoli)
- Vegetables (sundried tomato, beetroot, avocado, garlic)
- Tempeh and tofu
- Seasonings (nutritional yeast, Marmite, curry powder, cinnamon, parsley, thyme)
- Foods high in Vitamin C and citric acid, malic acid

Ensuring you eat from a wide variety of Iron rich foods, cooked in a variety of ways will help you to reach your Iron target. Also avoiding anti-nutrients in plant foods such as phytates and tannins, which reduce absorptive capacity of iron.

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	Serving Size	Mg of Iron
Protein		
Anchovy (canned)	100g	2.5mg
Chicken (thigh)	100g	0.56mg
Crab (cooked)	100g	2.72mg
Tempeh	100g	2.1-9.2mg
Firm tofu	100g	2.9mg
Sardine	100g	6.1mg
Beef steak	100g	3.0mg
Beef sausage	100g	5.8mg
Lamb	100g	2.8mg
Prawn (cooked)	100g	1.28mg
Squid / calamari	100g	1.6mg
Tuna (canned)	100g	1.2mg
Turkey (hind quarter)	100g	2.0mg
Egg (chicken)	100g	4.8mg
Fruit		
Figs	100g	1.4mg
Apricot (dried)	100g	3.1mg
Dates	100g	2.6mg
Vegetables		
Bok choy	100g	1.4mg
Garlic	100g	2.7mg
Sundried tomato	50g	2.8mg
Tomato paste	50g	2.35mg
Kale	1 cup	2.5mg
Red kidney beans	100g	2.1mg
Lima bean	100g	5.7mg
Lentil (hulled, dry)	100g	6.7mg
Parsley (Curly)	100g	9.4mg

Spinach (English)	100g	3.2mg
Watercress (raw)	100g	3.0mg
Nuts, seeds & grains		
Almond meal	100g	3.1mg
Buckwheat	1 cup	4.1mg
Amaranth (whole, uncooked)	100g	7mg
Cashew nut	50g	2.5mg
Muesli untoasted	100g	4.25mg
Tahini (sesame seed)	50g	2.5mg
Sunflower seed	25g	1.1mg
Wheat bran (unprocessed)	20g	2.2mg
Pepitas	50g	4.25mg
Soya flour	100g	8.2mg
Weetbix/ Vitabrits	100g	6.8mg
Seasonings & condiments		
Dark chocolate, no added sugar	100g	15mg
Cocoa powder	100g	30mg
Cinnamon	1 tsp	2.0mg
Golden syrup	50g	2.4mg
Marmite	1 tsp	1.8mg
Thyme (dried, ground)	1 tsp	1.5mg
Sage, Rosemary, Oregano	1 tsp	3.3mg
Cumin (dried, ground)	1 tsp	3.3mg

References:

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (2021). *Australian Food Composition Database*. Retrieved from <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/science/monitoringnutrients>

Health Direct. (2021). *Foods High in Iron*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/foods-high-in-iron>

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