North Cheshire and Mersey
NHS Foundation Trust

How to keep your iron levels healthy

Gastroenterology

Information for patients and carers

• Home • Community • Hospital

Caring for you

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Why is iron important?

You have been given this leaflet to help stop your iron levels becoming low.

Iron helps your body to:

- keep your muscles healthy
- support your immune system, which helps fight infection
- make haemoglobin (Hb), which carries oxygen around your body

Symptoms of low iron levels

Low iron levels can cause:

- feeling tired or lacking energy
- headaches
- dizziness
- restless legs
- food cravings
- brittle nails
- hair loss or thinning hair
- a racing or pounding heartbeat
- infections that take longer to get better
- mouth sores or ulcers

Why do iron levels become low?

There are many reasons why your iron level may become low.

Your diet

Your iron level may become low if you do not eat enough iron-rich foods.

Some people need more iron than others, including:

- children
- pregnant women
- breastfeeding women

Blood loss

Losing blood can reduce iron levels. This may happen because of:

- heavy periods
- surgery
- childbirth
- some bowel conditions

Problems taking in iron from food

Some health problems can stop your body taking in enough iron. These include:

- coeliac disease
- pernicious anaemia
- some stomach operations

Important

If you do not know why your iron is low, a health professional should find out why.

This is very important for:

- men
- women who have been through the menopause

Speak to your healthcare professional if you have any questions.

How much iron do I need each day?

- men aged 19 years and over: 8.7milligrams (mg)
- women aged 19 to 49 years: 14.8mg
- women aged 50 years and over: 8.7mg

Foods that contain iron

Many foods contain iron. Eating a balanced diet can help you keep healthy iron levels.

Your body takes in iron more easily from animal foods than from plant foods.

Animal-based food	Iron per 100g	Plant-based food	Iron per 100g
Beef rump steak	3.6mg	Sesame seeds	10.4mg
Beef mince (stewed)	2.7mg	Dried figs	3.9mg
Lamb leg (roasted)	1.8mg	Dried apricots	3.4mg
Pork sausages	1.1mg	Almonds	3mg
Prawns (boiled)	1.1mg	Peanut butter	2.1mg
Mackerel (grilled)	0.8mg	Chickpeas (boiled)	2mg
Pork chop (grilled)	0.7mg	Kidney beans (canned)	2mg
Chicken (roasted)	0.7mg	Spinach (boiled)	1.6mg
Salmon (steamed)	0.4mg	Butter beans (canned)	1.5mg
Cod or haddock (baked)	0.1mg	Baked beans in tomato sauce	1.4mg
Tuna (canned in brine)	0.1mg	Tofu (steamed)	1.2mg
Fried eggs	2.2mg	Broccoli (boiled)	1mg

Tips to help raise your iron levels

You can help your body take in more iron by:

- having fruit, vegetables or a small glass of orange juice with meals
- not having tea or coffee for 1 hour before and after eating
- steaming green vegetables instead of boiling them
- adding green leafy vegetables to your main meals
- eating iron-rich plant and animal food together
- soaking nuts and seeds before you eat them
- adding dried fruit to puddings
- choosing fruit or nuts as a snack
- choosing breakfast cereals with added iron

Meal ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal with added iron. Have it with fruit or a small glass of orange juice
- Wholemeal toast with fruit or a small glass of orange juice

Lunch

- Wholemeal sandwich with tuna or pork and salad
- Baked beans on wholemeal toast
- Salad topped with seeds, meat, fish or beans, and potatoes

Evening meal

- Meat, fish or pulses with veg and potatoes
- Bean chilli with potatoes and a side salad
- Baked potato with the skin on and baked beans and veg

Snacks

- Fresh or dried fruit
- A handful of nuts

Contact us

For more information about your individual dietary needs, please speak to your healthcare professional or contact your GP surgery.

Useful websites

NHS
www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/iron/

NHS Blood and Transplant
www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/what-we-do/blood-transfusion/

NHS Blood and Transplant
Iron deficiency anaemia - Hospitals and Science - NHSBT

British Dietetic Association
www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts