

Boost Your Iron Intake

Most people can meet their iron requirements by consuming a varied and balanced diet. Some foods are richer in iron than others. Red meats and offal are high in 'haem iron', and this iron is well absorbed by the body. However, as part of a healthy, balanced diet it is recommended to limit intake of red and processed meat to a maximum of 70g daily. Other sources of haem iron include animal proteins such as fish and poultry.

Plant-based sources of iron contain 'non-haem iron'. Some examples are pulses and legumes, nuts and seeds, and dark green vegetables. Foods may also be fortified with iron such as bread, breakfast cereals, and baby formula.

Enhance Absorption

To increase the absorption of iron from the foods we eat, it is advised to combine non-haem sources of iron with animal proteins and foods containing vitamin C. Foods containing phytates (e.g., wholegrain cereals, unleavened bread) or tannins (e.g., tea, coffee) can make it more difficult for the the body to absorb iron, therefore it is best to consume these foods separately to iron-rich foods.

Iron-Rich Foods

	Portion Size (g)	Amount of Iron (mg)
Beef (minced)	140	3.8
Tuna (canned in oil)	100	1.5
Baked Beans (in tomato sauce)	100	3
Peas	100	1.5
Lentils	100	3.5
Spinach	100	1.5
Cornflakes	30	2.4

Sources of Vitamin C

- Citrus fruits
- Fruit juice
- Green vegetables
- Tomatoes
- Peppers
- Potatoes

Supplements: Who Should Take Them?

As iron requirements may increase during menstruation and pregnancy, if you are pregnant or have heavy periods your doctor may measure your iron levels and recommend supplements if you are at risk of anaemia. Iron supplements should only be taken if advised by your GP and should not exceed a daily dose of 17mg.

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Are You Feeling Tired?

Why You Might Benefit from Including More Iron in Your Diet & How to Get Enough

What is Iron?

The body uses iron to make haemoglobin, a protein present in red blood cells that carries oxygen taken in by the lungs around the rest of the body. Iron deficiency anaemia occurs when there isn't enough haemoglobin in the blood to carry sufficient oxygen to your organs and tissues.

If your body doesn't make enough haemoglobin, you may suffer from symptoms such as:

- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Body weakness
- Pale complexion
- Shortness of breath
- Light-headedness

Continuously failing to meet your iron requirements can put you at increased risk of illness and infection and may increase your risk of developing conditions which affect the heart and lungs.

Pregnancy

Maintaining sufficient iron levels is particularly important in women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, as well as during menstruation.

Pregnant women with iron deficiency are at risk of preterm birth and low birth weight as the developing foetus relies on the mother's iron consumption for growth and development.

Iron Requirements

Iron is an essential mineral for both males and females. However, iron is of increased importance for women, particularly those of reproductive age. Women aged 19-49 need around twice the amount of iron per day as men.

29.9%

of women suffer from iron deficiency anaemia

61-97%

of women in Europe do not meet their recommended iron requirements

The NHS recommends a daily iron intake of:

- 14.8mg of for women of reproductive age (19-49 years)
- 8.7mg for women aged 50+
- 8.7mg for men aged 19+

For perspective, 14.8mg of iron is equivalent to the iron content of 2 tins of baked beans, 3 whole broccoli heads, or an entire box of Cheerio's!

Requirements can vary between individuals based on a number of factors therefore it is important to consult your doctor or dietitian.

