

**UW HEALTH - ONLINE HEALTH FACT**

**Iron in Your Diet**

Iron is an essential mineral for health. Too little iron can cause iron deficiency anemia. This can make you feel run down and increase your risk of illness or disease. Anemia is fairly common. It is seen more often in the elderly and in teens.

Iron needs vary with age and sex. The need for iron increases during growth periods (pregnancy, infancy, childhood, teen years) and for women having menstrual periods.

**Amount of Iron Needed Daily**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Milligrams/day</i>
Infants & Children	0-6 months	Not determined, seek advice from health provider
	7 months to 3 years	11
	4-8 years	10
Males	9-13 years	8
	14-18 years	11
	19-51+ years	8
Females	9-13 years	8
	14-18 years	15
	19-50 years	18
	51+ years	8
	Pregnant	27
	Breast feeding	9

**Forms of Dietary Iron**

There are two types of iron—**heme iron** and **non-heme iron**.

- **Heme iron** comes from animal sources such as beef, pork, lamb, fish, chicken, and turkey. Heme iron is the type of iron that is absorbed the best. The iron found in meat, fish and poultry is about 40% heme iron. The other 60% of the iron in meat, fish and poultry is the non-heme type.

- **Non-heme iron** is found in whole grains, enriched bread and cereal products, dried beans and peas, eggs, some green vegetables and in raisins, prunes, prune juice and dried apricots. Non-heme iron is not absorbed as well as heme iron.

If you eat a vegetarian diet, iron is not absorbed as well because it is the non-heme form of iron. A vegetarian may need about twice as much iron in their diet than that of a non-vegetarian. Vegetarians should try to eat iron-rich foods at every meal.

### Ways to increase your iron intake and absorption:

- Enjoy a number of the iron-rich foods from the list below. Aim for one iron-rich food at all meals.
- Combine vitamin C-rich foods with iron-rich foods. Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. This is very important for vegetarians who rely on non-heme iron from plant foods that is not absorbed as well.
- Use an iron-skillet for cooking. Some of the iron leaches into the food you are making.
- Use breakfast cereals that have been fortified with iron. Look for cereals that have at least 30% of the USRDA (Recommended Daily Allowance) for iron.
- Add blackstrap molasses and sorghum to baked goods to increase iron content.

### Food Sources of Vitamin C

*Over 75 mg per ½ c. serving*

orange  
broccoli  
brussels sprout

*25-75 mg per ½ c. serving*

cantaloupe  
grapefruit  
orange juice  
strawberries  
vegetable greens: kale, beet, mustard

cabbage  
tomato  
turnip  
green pepper

### Approximate Iron Content of Foods

#### ***Foods with Heme Iron***

	<b><i>mg Iron</i></b>
beef, 3 oz.	3.0
beef Liver, 3.5 oz.	6.7
chicken, 3 oz.	1.2
dried peas or beans, ½ c. cooked	2.0
egg, 1 medium	1.0
fish-tuna, ½ c.	1.6
lean ham, 3.5 oz.	1.5
oysters, 3 oz.	7.8
peanut butter, 2 tbsp.	0.6
pork, 3 oz.	2.7
salmon, wild, 3 oz.	0.8

#### ***Foods with Non-heme Iron***

fortified cereal, 1 oz.	4.5-18
tofu, raw, ½ cup	6.6
instant oatmeal, 1 packet	6.3
lentils, 1 cup	6.6
kidney beans, 1 cup	5.2
garbanzo beans, 1 cup	4.7
enriched white rice or pasta, cooked, 1 cup	1.9
spinach, boiled, ½ cup	3.2
green peas, ½ cup	1.2

wheat bread, 1 slice	0.9
dried apricots, 5 whole	1.9
prunes, 5 medium	1.2
prune juice, ½ c.	5.2
raisins, 2 tbsp.	0.6
blackstrap molasses, 1 tbsp.	3.2

<i>Infant foods, strained</i>	<i>mg iron</i>
high meat dinner, 1 jar	1.5
strained meat, 1 jar	2.0
vegetable / meat dinner, 1 jar	1.0
strained vegetables, 1 jar	1.2
iron-fortified infant cereal, 3 tbsp. (1/2 oz)	7.0
iron-fortified formula, 26 oz.	10.0

### **Iron Supplements**

**Men:** Since men's needs are much lower than women's, it's easy to get the needed amounts from food sources alone. Taking an iron pill is not often needed. If you choose to take a daily multivitamin-mineral, be sure it provides no more than 10-11 mg iron. Large amounts of iron are toxic.

**Women:** Women who are menstruating, very active, or pregnant, may need a daily multivitamin-mineral with 18 mg iron (more is needed for pregnant women). You should only take a greater amount of iron if told to do so by your doctor. Large amounts of iron can be toxic.

### **Iron Needs for Infants**

- Infants should receive an iron-fortified formula if they are not breastfeeding.
- Infant iron-fortified cereals should be used until 18 months of age. Your doctor may suggest which formula and/or cereal to use.
- Your child will need an iron food source starting no later than 4 months of age. One such source would be to use an iron-fortified formula from 4 months of age until your infant is eating two servings of iron-fortified cereal a day.

If you have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below.

Nutrition Clinic Room 193  
University Station  
2880 University Avenue  
Madison, WI 53705  
(608) 263-5012

Nutrition Clinic Room 1296  
UW Health West Clinic  
451 Junction Road  
Madison, WI 53717  
(608) 265-7526

Nutrition Clinic Room 2085  
UW Health East Clinic  
5249 East Terrace Drive  
Madison, WI 53718  
(608) 265-0963