

## Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

# Dietary advice to increase your iron intake

### What is Iron?

Iron is a mineral that is essential for health and an essential component of our diet. If you do not eat enough foods containing iron you can develop a condition called iron deficiency anaemia.

### What does iron do?

Iron is needed to make haemoglobin. Haemoglobin is found in the blood and carries oxygen to the cells of the body. Oxygen is needed for our cells and tissues to function normally.

### What happens if I have low iron levels?

Too little iron in the body will reduce the amount of haemoglobin made and the amount of oxygen available to our cells. This is a common cause of anaemia. Low iron levels can be caused by poor dietary intake of iron or high blood losses.

### Common symptoms of low iron or anaemia:

- Tiredness or feeling weak
- Shortness of breath
- Lack of energy
- A pale complexion

### How much iron do I need?

| Daily Iron Recommendations | (mg) |
|----------------------------|------|
| • 0-3 months               | 1.7  |
| • 4-6 months               | 4.3  |
| • 7-12 months              | 7.8  |
| • 1-3 years                | 6.9  |
| • 4-6 years                | 6.1  |
| • 7-10 years               | 8.7  |
| • Males 11-18 years        | 11.3 |
| • Males over 19 years      | 8.7  |
| • Females 11-50 years      | 14.8 |
| • Females over 50 years    | 8.7  |

### Who may need extra iron to prevent a deficiency?

- Pregnant women
- Preterm and low birth weight infants
- Older infants and toddlers
- Teenage girls
- Women of childbearing age, especially those with heavy menstrual losses
- People with renal failure, especially those undergoing routine dialysis
- People with gastrointestinal disorders who do not absorb iron normally

Please ask your doctor or dietitian for more information if you are concerned.

## How can I increase my intake of iron?

A healthy balanced diet that regularly includes iron-rich foods and vitamin C should meet a person's daily iron needs. However, if your iron is low or you are at risk of low iron (for example from high blood losses) you may need to make changes to:

1. Include more iron-rich foods in your diet
2. Include foods or drinks containing vitamin C with your meals
3. Be cautious about which foods and drinks you combine

## Do I need iron supplements?

If your iron levels are low or very low, your health professional may recommend an iron supplement which can be prescribed by your doctor. Side effects of taking iron supplements may include constipation, black stools, nausea, vomiting and stomach ache. Talk to your doctor if you experience any of these symptoms.

## Iron-rich foods

Meat and fish products are high sources of iron. Iron from these products is called 'haem iron' and is readily absorbed by our bodies.

Non-animal sources of iron contain 'non-haem iron' which is harder for our bodies to absorb. It is still possible to get enough iron following a vegetarian diet as long as the diet is balanced. The absorption of non-haem iron can be increased significantly, if good supplies of vitamin C containing foods are eaten regularly.

Follow the advice below to help your body to absorb the iron from your food. This is especially important for the absorption of non-haem iron.

- Eat or drink foods/fluids containing vitamin C with your meals. Examples include vegetables, salad, potatoes, fruit and fruit/vegetable juices, fortified fruit squashes/cordials. You may like to include fruit or fruit juice with your breakfast and lightly cooked vegetables, salad and/or potatoes with your meals. Avoid over-cooking vegetables to reduce vitamin C losses.
- Avoid drinking tea, coffee, wine, beer, cider or fizzy drinks with meals as tannins and phosphates in these drinks can interfere with the absorption of iron
- Bran can be a healthy part of your diet, but avoid having high bran products with every meal. Unprocessed bran and bread/cereals high in bran contain substances that prevent effective iron absorption.

## Foods high in iron:

Offal\* (liver, including liver pate and liver sausage, kidney, heart)

Black pudding

Meat (beef, pork, lamb, poultry, meat paste and meat products)

Oily fish (pilchards, sardines, mackerel, herrings, fish paste)

\* If you are pregnant you should avoid eating liver due to the high amount of vitamin A that it contains, which may harm your developing baby.

## Non-meat sources of iron:

Beans (including baked beans and soya beans)

Pulses (including lentils and dhal)

Quinoa

Nuts and seeds (including peanuts and peanut butter)

Dried fruit (such as dried apricots)

Dark green leafy vegetables (such as watercress and curly kale)

Bread and breakfast cereals that have been fortified with iron

Fortified chapatti flour

Eggs

The following table may help you to ensure that you are getting enough iron from your diet

| <b>Fish Products</b>            | <b>Average serving</b> | <b>mg per serving</b> |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Boiled mussels                  | 100g                   | 7.7                   |
| Fish paste                      | 20g                    | 1.8                   |
| Canned anchovies                | 50g                    | 2.1                   |
| Canned crab                     | 50g                    | 1.4                   |
| Canned sardines in tomato sauce | 50g                    | 2.3                   |
| Baked kipper baked              | 50g                    | 0.7                   |
| Battered cod                    | 150g                   | 0.8                   |
| Steamed lemon sole              | 125g                   | 0.75                  |
| Tinned tuna in oil              | 70g                    | 1.1                   |
| Prawns                          | 50g                    | 0.6                   |
| Smoked mackerel                 | 50g                    | 0.6                   |
| Grilled salmon                  | 100g                   | 1.4                   |

| <b>Meat Products</b>     | <b>Average serving</b> | <b>mg per serving</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Pig liver                | 50g                    | 8.5                   |
| Black pudding            | 60g                    | 7.4                   |
| Calf liver               | 50g                    | 6.1                   |
| Lamb kidney              | 50g                    | 5.6                   |
| Grilled rump steak, lean | 150g                   | 5.4                   |
| Roast venison            | 80g                    | 4.1                   |
| Shish kebab, meat only   | 100g                   | 2.6                   |
| Stewed beef mince        | 80g                    | 2.2                   |
| Roast duck               | 80g                    | 2.2                   |
| Scotch eggs              | 120g                   | 2.2                   |
| Lamb chops, grilled      | 100g                   | 2.1                   |
| Beef burger              | 100g                   | 2.5                   |
| Liver pate               | 25g                    | 1.5                   |
| Corned beef, canned      | 60g                    | 1.4                   |
| Pork pie                 | 100g                   | 1.1                   |

| <b>Beans and Pulses</b>     | <b>Average</b> | <b>mg per</b> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Soybeans                    | 100g           | 3.0           |
| Kidney beans                | 100g           | 2.0           |
| Chick peas                  | 100g           | 1.5           |
| Lentils (green, brown)      | 32g            | 1.1           |
| Black eyed beans boiled     | 40g            | 0.76          |
| Lentils (split, red) boiled | 32g            | 1.1           |
| Mung beans boiled           | 40g            | 0.6           |
| Baked beans                 | 150g           | 2.1           |
| Aduki beans                 | 40g            | 0.8           |
| Broad beans                 | 40g            | 0.6           |
| Tofu (soya bean curd)       | 50g            | 0.6           |

| <b>Potatoes</b>      | <b>Average</b> | <b>mg per</b> |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Boiled new with skin | 150g           | 2.4           |
| Fried chips          | 150g           | 1.5           |
| Oven chips           | 150g           | 1.2           |
| Jacket with skin     | 150g           | 1.1           |
| Potato croquettes    | 100g           | 0.9           |
| Sweet potato         | 100g           | 0.7           |

| <b>Pine nuts</b>    | <b>Average</b> | <b>mg per</b> |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Cashew nuts         | 40g            | 2.5           |
|                     | 30g            | 1.7           |
| Sesame seeds/tahini | 10g            | 1             |
| Hazelnuts           | 30g            | 1             |
| Sunflower seeds     | 15g            | 1             |
| Almonds             | 30g            | 0.9           |
| Pistachios          | 30g            | 0.5           |
| Walnuts             | 30g            | 0.5           |
| Plain peanuts       | 30g            | 0.8           |
| Desiccated coconut  | 15g            | 0.5           |

| <b>Fortified Cereals*</b> | <b>Average serving</b> | <b>mg per serving</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Wheat biscuits            | 37.5g                  | 4.5                   |
| Honey Nuggets             | 30g                    | 2.3                   |
| Cookie Crisp              | 30g                    | 2.5                   |
| Coco Pops                 | 30g                    | 2.4                   |
| Cheerios                  | 30g                    | 3.8                   |
| Shreddies                 | 40g                    | 4.5                   |
| Multigrain Flakes         | 40g                    | 3.5                   |
| High Fibre Bran           | 40g                    | 3.5                   |
| Fruit n Fibre             | 40g                    | 3.5                   |
| Bran Flakes               | 30g                    | 3.5                   |
| Rice Puffs                | 30g                    | 2.4                   |
| Corn Flakes               | 30g                    | 2.4                   |
| Frosted Flakes            | 30g                    | 2.8                   |
| Muesli (swiss style)      | 45g                    | 2.6                   |

\* Please note that iron content varies between brands and that some cereals are fortified with iron.

| <b>Breads and Grains</b> | <b>Average serving</b>        | <b>mg per serving</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Wholemeal bread          | 2 medium slices               | 2.2                   |
| White bread              | 2 medium slices               | 1.3                   |
| Oats/Instant Porridge    | 1 bowl (30g)                  | 1.1                   |
| Rice, White              | 1 cup                         | 0.2                   |
| Rice, Brown              | 1 cup                         | 0.5                   |
| Pasta                    | Medium - large portion (100g) | 0.5                   |
| Pasta, Whole-Wheat       | Medium - large portion (100g) | 1.4                   |

**If there is anything you want to know about your diet you can contact the Dietitians at:**

**Huddersfield Royal Infirmary on 01484 342749  
Calderdale Royal Hospital on 01422 224267**

**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

Dietetic Service Manager – Dietetic Department

Huddersfield Royal Infirmary on 01484 342749  
Calderdale Royal Hospital on 01422 224267

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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