



Maitri Health Care for Women

Obstetrics, Gynecology and Midwifery

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Iron Needs for Pregnancy

Why do I need iron?

Iron is a mineral that makes up an important part of hemoglobin, the substance in blood that carries oxygen throughout the body. Iron also carries oxygen in muscles, helping them function properly. In addition, iron helps increase your resistance to stress and disease.

The body absorbs iron more efficiently during pregnancy. Therefore it is important to consume more iron while you are pregnant. Iron will also help you avoid symptoms of tiredness, weakness, irritability, and depression.

How much iron should I consume during pregnancy?

Following a balanced diet and including foods high in iron can help ensure that you are consuming enough iron throughout your pregnancy. Your prenatal vitamin may also contain iron as a supplement. In addition, the following guidelines will help:

1. The U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance (USRDA) for iron is **30 milligrams (mg) per day** for pregnant and lactating (breastfeeding) women.
2. Eating at least three servings of iron-rich foods a day will help ensure that you are getting 30 mg of iron in your daily diet. Please refer to the charts below for a list of iron-rich foods. One of the best ways to get iron into your diet is to eat a highly fortified breakfast cereal, such as Total, which has 18 mg of iron. Note that iron intake is not equal to iron absorption. Absorption of iron into the body is greatest with meat sources of iron.
3. The best sources of iron include enriched grain products; lean meat, poultry, and fish; and leafy green vegetables. Please refer to the chart below for a list of iron sources.

Facts about iron

- Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. Foods high in Vitamin C include orange juice, grapefruit juice, green peppers, broccoli, melon, strawberries, and cabbage. It can be helpful to combine iron rich food sources combined with Vitamin C rich foods.

- Caffeine can inhibit the absorption of iron. Try to consume iron supplements and foods high in iron at least one to three hours before or after drinking or eating foods containing caffeine. In general, caffeine is found in coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate products. Caffeine-free colas and many medicines also contain caffeine.
- Iron is also not absorbed as well combined with Calcium products such as milk, yogurt and cheese. It is also important if you are taking an extra iron supplement to take it at least 2 hours apart from your prenatal vitamin.
- Iron is lost in cooking some foods. To retain iron, cook foods in a minimal amount of water and for the shortest possible time. Also, cooking in cast iron pots can add up to 80 percent more iron to foods.
- Constipation is a common side effect of taking iron supplements. To help relieve constipation, slowly increase the fiber in your diet by including whole grain breads, cereals, fruits, and vegetables. Drinking at least eight cups of water daily and increasing moderate exercise (as recommended by your physician) can also help you avoid constipation. You can also add in an over-the-counter stool softener such as Colace to help.

Should I take an iron supplement?

Nutrient requirements increase during pregnancy to support baby growth and maternal health. Iron requirements of pregnant women are approximately double that of non-pregnant women because of the increased blood volume during pregnancy, the increased needs of the baby and blood losses that occur during delivery. If the iron intake does not meet the increased requirements, iron deficiency anemia may occur.

We will screen you for anemia around 28 weeks gestation with a complete blood count (CBC). If your hemoglobin or hematocrit are below 11 and 33, we will recommend an extra iron supplement which you can buy over the counter.

We recommend ferrous sulfate or ferrous gluconate 325 mg once or twice a day, depending on your CBC levels. Make sure the bottle reads "65 mg elemental iron". If the extra supplement is causing GI upset, you can try SlowFe which is a slower released iron supplement.

Iron Rich Foods

Table 1: Selected Food Sources of Heme Iron

Food	Milligrams per serving	% DV*
Chicken liver, pan-fried, 3 ounces	11.0	61
Oysters, canned, 3 ounces	5.7	32
Beef liver, pan-fried, 3 ounces	5.2	29
Beef, chuck, blade roast, lean only, braised, 3 ounces	3.1	17
Turkey, dark meat, roasted, 3 ounces	2.0	11
Beef, ground, 85% lean, patty, broiled, 3 ounces	2.2	12
Beef, top sirloin, steak, lean only, broiled, 3 ounces	1.6	9
Tuna, light, canned in water, 3 ounces	1.3	7
Turkey, light meat, roasted, 3 ounces	1.1	6
Chicken, dark meat, meat only, roasted, 3 ounces	1.1	6
Chicken, light meat, meat only, roasted, 3 ounces	0.9	5
Tuna, fresh, yellowfin, cooked, dry heat, 3 ounces	0.8	4
Crab, Alaskan king, cooked, moist heat, 3 ounces	0.7	4
Pork, loin chop, broiled, 3 ounces	0.7	4
Shrimp, mixed species, cooked, moist heat, 4 large	0.3	2
Halibut, cooked, dry heat, 3 ounces	0.2	1

Table 2: Selected Food Sources of Nonheme Iron

Food	Milligrams per serving	% DV*
Ready-to-eat cereal, 100% iron fortified, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup	18.0	100
Oatmeal, instant, fortified, prepared with water, 1 packet	11.0	61
Soybeans, mature, boiled, 1 cup	8.8	48
Lentils, boiled, 1 cup	6.6	37
Beans, kidney, mature, boiled, 1 cup	5.2	29
Beans, lima, large, mature, boiled, 1 cup	4.5	25
Ready-to-eat cereal, 25% iron fortified, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup	4.5	25
Blackeye peas, (cowpeas), mature, boiled, 1 cup	4.3	24
Beans, navy, mature, boiled, 1 cup	4.3	24
Beans, black, mature, boiled, 1 cup	3.6	20
Beans, pinto, mature, boiled, 1 cup	3.6	21
Tofu, raw, firm, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	3.4	19
Spinach, fresh, boiled, drained, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	3.2	18
Spinach, canned, drained solids $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	2.5	14
Spinach, frozen, chopped or leaf, boiled $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	1.9	11

Table 2: Selected Food Sources of Nonheme Iron

Food	Milligrams per serving	% DV*
Raisins, seedless, packed, ½ cup	1.6	9
Grits, white, enriched, quick, prepared with water, 1 cup	1.5	8
Molasses, 1 tablespoon	0.9	5
Bread, white, commercially prepared, 1 slice	0.9	5
Bread, whole-wheat, commercially prepared, 1 slice	0.7	4

Iron-Rich Foods

Foods that provide .5 to 1.5 milligrams of iron:

- Chicken, 3 ounces
- Green peas, 1/2 cup
- Tomato juice, 6 ounces
- Broccoli, 1/2 cup
- Brussels sprouts, 1/2 cup cooked
- Whole wheat bread, 1 slice
- Dried apricots, 5 halves
- Raspberries, 1 cup
- Strawberries, 1 cup

Foods that provide 1.6 to 3 milligrams of iron:

- Sirloin steak, 3 ounces
- Roast beef, 3 ounces
- Lean hamburger, 3 ounces
- Baked potato with skin
- Kidney beans, 1/2 cup cooked
- Lima beans, 1/2 cup cooked
- Navy beans, 1/2 cup cooked
- Oatmeal, 1 cup cooked

- Raisins, 1/2 cup

Foods that provide 3 to 12 milligrams of iron:

- Clams, 4 large or 9 small
- Oysters, 6 medium
- Spinach, 1/2 cup cooked
- Fortified cereal, 1 cup

Additional sources of iron:

- All kinds of liver (except fish) — however, liver should not be eaten more than once a week
- Lean beef, veal, pork or lamb
- Greens, all kinds
- Beets
- Sauerkraut
- Tofu
- Lentils
- Soy bean flour
- Enriched pastas
- Unrefined sugars, such as molasses