

Iron Intake during Pregnancy

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

Why do I need iron?

- Iron is essential for good health, especially healthy blood.
- You need more iron than usual during pregnancy to make sure that you and your baby have an adequate supply.
- A lack of iron can cause anaemia, which can make you feel tired, irritable and lacking concentration.
- You should therefore include iron-rich foods as part of your daily diet.

How can I improve my iron intake?

Iron from animal foods:

- The body uses the iron in animal foods easily, so these foods are particularly useful to replace low iron stores.
- Have at least 1 portion of food from this list daily:

Meat:

- Beef (including corned beef), lamb, pork, chicken, turkey and duck.
- Pheasant, pigeon, grouse, hare, rabbit and venison.
- Cook all meats thoroughly to avoid bacterial contamination.

Fish:

- Oily fish such as:
- Salmon, sardines, pilchards, mackerel, tuna, kippers, herring and tuna steak.
(No more than 2 portions per week)

Please note: Liver and liver products like liver pâté are rich in iron, but are not recommended during pregnancy because of their high vitamin A content, which can harm unborn babies.

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Other good sources of iron:

These foods contain iron but it may not be so easily absorbed and used by the body:

- Bread, especially wholemeal and granary
- Pulses – peas, lentils, beans
- Dried fruits – apricots, figs, peaches, prunes, currants, raisins, sultanas, dates
- Breakfast cereals fortified with iron and without added wheat bran, such as Weetabix, Cornflakes, Crunchy Nut Cornflakes, Frosties, Rice Krispies, Special K, Coco Pops.
- Cocoa powder, chocolate drinks fortified with iron, such as Milo, Ovaltine.
- Dark green vegetables, such as broccoli, spring greens, okra and spinach
- Eggs
- Nuts - **but peanuts should be avoided throughout pregnancy if there is a strong family history of allergy.**

If you rely mainly on non-animal foods to meet your daily iron needs, have at least 3 servings each day.

Foods that contain poorly used iron

Some foods contain iron, but they also contain substances that make it difficult for the body to absorb or use this iron. The body will only use a small amount of the total iron from these foods. Foods in this group include:

- Breakfast cereals fortified with iron, but high in added wheat bran, such as Branflakes and Allbran.

The following Can improve the iron absorption from non-meat foods.

- Have something rich in vitamin C at the same meal
 - all fruit and fruit juice, particularly citrus fruits, such as oranges, grapefruits, kiwi, strawberries, guava, lychees, and paw-paw.
 - all fresh and frozen vegetables, especially tomatoes and sweet peppers.
- Avoid drinking tea and coffee at meal times because the tannin reduces the absorption of iron.
- Do not add raw wheat bran to foods or drinks because it prevents iron absorption.