

## Iron Rich Diet

An iron-rich diet is a diet that includes rich sources of iron each day. You or your child may need to follow an iron-rich diet to treat or prevent a low blood iron level. People need extra iron during childhood, adolescence (teenage years), and pregnancy. Iron is a mineral the body needs to make hemoglobin (HE-mo-gloh-bin). Hemoglobin helps carry oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body. A low blood iron level may be caused by not getting enough iron from food or by losing blood. Women may have low iron during their reproductive years due to their menses. If you do not have enough iron in your blood, you may get iron deficiency anemia. Iron deficiency anemia may cause problems with a child's growth and development, and cause other health problems in adults.

### What are some iron-rich foods?

**Meat, fish, poultry:** The body absorbs the most iron from meat, fish and poultry (chicken). The amount of iron, in milligrams (mg), that is found in these foods is listed below:

- **Very good sources (3.5 mg or more per serving):**
  - Three ounces of beef or chicken liver.
  - Three ounces of clams or mollusks.
  - Three ounces of oysters.
  
- **Good sources (2.1 mg or more per serving):**
  - Three ounces of cooked beef (ground or steak).
  - Three ounces of canned sardines (canned in oil).
  - Three ounces of cooked turkey.
  
- **Other sources (0.7 mg or more per serving):**
  - Three ounces of chicken.

- Three ounces of halibut, haddock, perch, salmon, and tuna.
- Three ounces of pork (ham).
- Three ounces of veal.

**Other iron-rich foods:** Other foods also contain iron, but your body does not absorb the iron from these foods as well. To increase iron absorption (ab-SORP-shun) from the following foods, eat a **good source of Vitamin C at the same time**. Eating a food from the **meat, fish, and poultry group at the same time** will also increase iron absorption. The amount of iron that is found in these foods is listed below:

- **Very good sources (3.5 mg or more):**
  - Breakfast cereals enriched with iron (see food label for serving size).
  - One cup of cooked beans (white beans, soybeans, lentils or chickpeas).
  - One-half of a cup of tofu.
  - One ounce of pumpkin, sesame, or squash seeds.
  
- **Good sources (2.1 mg or more):**
  - One-half cup of canned lima, red kidney beans, chickpeas or split peas.
  - One cup of dried apricots.
  - One medium baked potato.
  - One medium stalk of broccoli.
  - One cup of cooked enriched egg noodles.
  - One-fourth of a cup of wheat germ.
  
- **Other sources (0.7 mg or more):**
  - One ounce of peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pistachios, roasted almonds, roasted cashews, or sunflower seeds.
  - One-half of a cup of dried seedless raisins, peaches, or prunes.
  - One cup of spinach.

- One medium green pepper.
- One cup of pasta.
- One slice of bread, pumpernickel bagel, or bran muffin.
- One cup of rice.

**What are good sources of vitamin C?** Eating a source of vitamin C with (non-meat) iron-rich foods can help your body to absorb more iron. Some foods that are good sources of vitamin C are listed below:

- **Fruits:**

- One cup of fresh orange juice (124 mg).
- One cup of raw strawberries (98 mg).
- One cup of pink grapefruit juice (94 mg)
- One orange (70 mg).
- One cup of cantaloupe (59 mg).
- One-half of a grapefruit (39 mg).

- **Vegetables:**

- One cup of sweet, red, raw peppers (283 mg).
- One cups of fresh boiled broccoli (101 mg).
- One cup of cooked brussel sprouts (97 mg).
- One cup of cooked peas (77 mg).
- One cup of cooked cauliflower (55 mg)
- One cup of tomato juice (44 mg).

**What foods decrease the amount of iron that your body absorbs from foods?**

- There are certain foods that keep your body from absorbing iron from iron-rich foods. These foods include coffee and tea, high-fiber foods and soy products (tofu, soybeans). To increase the absorption of iron in your foods, do the following:

- Drink coffee and tea separately from meals that contain iron-rich foods.
- Eat high-fiber foods and soy products with a good source of vitamin C to increase the absorption of iron. You can also eat high-fiber foods and soy products with meat, fish, or poultry (chicken) to increase iron absorption.

### What other diet guidelines should I follow?

- Food that is cooked in iron skillets or pots, steel woks and steel cookware may add extra iron to foods.
- Include iron-rich foods in your diet every day to increase your blood iron level. Ask your caregiver how much iron you or your child needs each day.
- Limit the amount of cow's milk and juice that you give to children between one and three years old. Children only need about 24 ounces of milk each day. When children drink too much milk and juice, they may eat less iron-rich solid foods. This may cause them to have a low level of iron in their blood.
- When feeding children under the age of 5 years, be sure to avoid foods that could cause choking. You may want to avoid iron-rich nuts and seeds in this age group.

### Risks:

- Not including iron-rich foods in your diet every day may cause your iron levels to decrease. This may lead to iron-deficiency anemia, especially during periods when your body needs extra iron.
- Iron deficiency anemia may cause problems with your child's growth and development. If you have iron deficiency anemia, you may have other health problems. It may take longer for you or your child to increase your blood iron level if you do not follow an iron-rich diet.