

# Facts about Iron<sup>1</sup>

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## Why do we need iron?

Iron is a mineral that is found in every cell in the body. It's an important part of red blood cells, which carry oxygen to all the cells. Our cells use oxygen to make energy



from the food we eat. Iron also is needed to keep the immune system healthy and help brain cells work normally.

## What happens if we don't get enough iron?

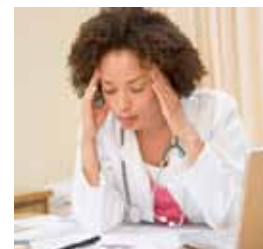
Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency in the world. Severe iron deficiency can lead to one type of anemia. Iron deficiency can be caused by several factors including:

- Ü not getting enough iron in the diet
- Ü not absorbing iron properly
- Ü losing blood from injury or illness

Without adequate iron, red blood cells cannot carry enough oxygen to other cells in the body. Cells that do not get the oxygen they need cannot function properly.

Signs of an iron deficiency include:

- Ü feeling tired
- Ü infections
- Ü muscle weakness
- Ü inability to concentrate



## How much iron do we need?

The following table lists recommended daily intakes of iron:

Life Stage	Amount (mg/day)
Men, ages 19+	8*
Women, ages 19-50	18**
Women, ages 51+	8*
Pregnancy	27
Breastfeeding	
Ages 14-18	10
Ages 19-50	9
mg = milligrams	
*vegetarians in this life stage need 14 mg/d	
**vegetarians in this life stage need 32 mg/d	

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## How can we get enough iron?

Both animal and plant foods contain iron, but our bodies absorb the iron from meats and other foods from animals better than iron from plant foods.



To increase the amount of iron that is absorbed from plant foods, eat them with foods high in vitamin C or with meat, poultry, or fish. Foods high in vitamin C include oranges, peppers, and strawberries.

Here are some foods and the amount of iron they contain:

Food	Iron (mg/serving)
Fortified cereal, 1 cup	5–30
Liverwurst, 2 ounces	6
Oysters, cooked, 6 medium	4
Baked beans, canned, 1 cup	4
Beef burrito, 1	3
Lean sirloin, broiled, 3 ounces	3
Wheat germ, ¼ cup	3
Prune juice, ¾ cup	2
Bean burrito, 1	2
Beef, lean ground, cooked, 3 ounces	2
Tofu, firm, 3½ ounces	1–3
mg = milligrams	

## What about supplements?

Some groups of people need iron supplements. These include pregnant women and persons with an iron deficiency. People who do not get enough iron from food may choose to take an iron supplement.

**Be sure to keep supplements out of the reach of children because an overdose of iron can be fatal.**



## How much is too much?

Too much iron can be toxic to the body. It can cause nausea, vomiting, constipation or diarrhea. Over a long period of time, too much iron in the body can damage the liver. In addition, too much iron from supplements can reduce the amount of zinc that is absorbed.

**You should not get more than 45 mg of iron per day from food and supplements.**

## Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your local Extension office may have written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. Also, your doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information.

Reliable nutrition information may also be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

<http://mayoclinic.com>

<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/iron.asp>