

What is iron?

Iron is an essential mineral. It is found in all cells in the body.

What does iron do?

- Iron forms part of the hemoglobin in your body's red blood cells.
- Red blood cells carry oxygen from the lungs to cells in all parts of the body.
- The oxygen is used to make energy.
- The energy helps cells in your body work, so you can move, think, breathe and your heart can beat.

An Iron Healthy Diet

What do I need to eat to get enough iron?

It is important to get iron from several different food sources. Iron comes in two forms:

1. **Heme iron** is very easily absorbed by the body. Foods with heme iron are:
 - Beef
 - Lamb
 - Pork
 - Liver
 - Veal
 - Turkey and Chicken
(dark meat has more iron)
 - Fish and Seafood
2. **Non-heme iron** is not as well absorbed as heme iron. Foods with non-heme iron are:
 - Iron fortified Breakfast Cereals
(oatmeal, cream of wheat)

- Whole grain and enriched Breads and Pasta
- Lentils
- Dried Peas and Beans
- Seeds and nuts
(pumpkin, sesame, peanuts, hazelnuts)
- Dried fruits
(dates, raisins, apricots)
- Dark green leafy vegetables
(spinach, broccoli, brussels sprouts)
- Eggs

What can I do to get the iron from my food?

1. **Eat heme iron foods.** Heme iron is easier to absorb than non-heme iron. Eating heme iron foods also helps your body to absorb non-heme iron from other foods.
2. **Eat foods high in Vitamin C with your meals.** Foods that contain Vitamin C help your body use non-heme iron. Foods that are good sources of Vitamin C are:
 - Peppers
(green, yellow or red)
 - Oranges
 - Mandarins
 - Grapefruits
 - Raspberries
 - Strawberries
 - Tomatoes
 - Kiwis
 - Cauliflower
 - Turnips
 - Broccoli
 - Brussels sprouts
 - 100% Orange or Tomato Juice
 - Apple Juice with vitamin C added

3. **Do not have tea or coffee with your meals.** Tea and coffee contain polyphenols. Polyphenols decrease the amount of non-heme iron your body can absorb.

Iron Supplements

Iron supplements should be taken only on the advice of a Doctor (too much iron could be harmful).

Which supplement should I take?

There are many iron supplements available such as Ferrous Gluconate, Ferrous Sulphate and Ferrous Fumarate. Some can be purchased without a prescription. Discuss which one is best for you with your pharmacist.

How do I take the iron?

You may take 1 tablet three times a day or 3 tablets at bedtime. Iron is best taken on an empty stomach, one hour before or two hours after meals with a full glass of water.

Iron may upset your stomach, if so take it after meals or with food. Avoid having milk or dairy products with the iron pills as this can decrease iron absorption.

What are the side effects?

When taking iron supplements, minor side effects are common, especially the first few days as your body adjusts. If the side effects continue, talk to your doctor about trying a smaller dose.