

Managing Low Iron Levels

Low iron levels are common in Australia and New Zealand. Over a third of women have low iron and about 2% of men¹. Women are more prone due to blood loss from menstruation so its important they manage their iron intake.

What is Iron?

Iron is a mineral found in our red blood cells that helps to move oxygen around the body. It is therefore very important for energy, immunity and muscle function.



How much iron do I need?²

Adults:

(Women ages 19-50 years) **18 mg per day**

(Men ages 19+ years and Women ages 51+ years) **8 mg per day**

Children:

(Children ages 1-13 years) **8-10 mg per day**

(Girls ages 14-18 years) **15 mg per day**

(Boys ages 14-18 years) **11 mg per day**

Typical iron content of common foods:

150g chickpeas



9.3mg

65g chicken liver



7.8mg

65g lean beef



2.85mg

30g fortified breakfast cereal



2.5mg

½ cup cooked spinach



2.2mg

2 eggs



2.2mg

30g cashews



1.5mg

100g tuna



1mg

½ cup cooked peas



0.9mg

Serving sizes adapted from the Australian Guide Healthy Eating, 2013. New Zealand serving sizes are similar.



Did you know?

Vitamin C is a nutrient that helps with iron absorption! This is because vitamin C is able to prevent iron from being digested in your gut before it enters your blood.

Foods such as oranges, strawberries, tomato and capsicum are excellent sources of vitamin C. Having an iron-fortified cereal with some strawberries and milk, or a tofu salad with tomato and capsicum are some ideas to combine the two essential nutrients.



Iron in food:

Iron is found in both animal and plant foods. Iron from animal sources is more bioavailable (absorbed better) than plant foods.³ That's not to say plant foods are not valuable sources of iron. You can easily meet your iron requirements if you choose both plant and animal foods.

Animal sources:



Red Meat



Chicken



Fish

Plant sources:



Fortified Cereals



Legumes



Green leafy Vegetables



Tofu

Breakfast cereal is number 1

Breakfast cereal is the number one source of iron in both the Australian and New Zealand diet⁴. Fortified breakfast cereals are a good way to ensure that you are meeting your iron requirements, especially if you are a vegetarian.

Quick Tips:

- Do not have tea, coffee or cola products when eating your iron rich foods as they reduce absorption.
- Have regular blood tests with your GP to determine your level of iron.

What if I don't eat animal products?

That is perfectly okay! It is still possible to meet your iron requirements from plant sources alone. Iron fortified breakfast cereals, tofu, chickpeas, baked beans, legumes and spinach are all plant sources that have iron. You may also need to take an iron supplement. Consult your health professional to see if one is required.

Your Health Professional Recommends



1 ABS. Iron 2014, cat. no. 4364.0.55.008, ABS, Canberra.
 2 NHMRC. Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand 2005, Canberra
 3 Singh, P et al. Food Chemistry 2016; 207; 125-131.
 4 ABS. National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, 2011-12. Canberra

Disclaimer: These fact sheets are not meant to replace dietary advice provided by your doctor or dietitian. Please consult with your doctor or dietitian before making changes to your diet or physical activity routine.