

# Iron and Your Health

Your body needs iron to help carry the oxygen in your blood through your body. Without enough iron, you will tire more easily and be less able to fight off infections.

Babies and children also need iron for healthy brain development.

## How much iron do I need?

Your iron needs change throughout your life.

### Daily Recommended Intake for Iron

Age	Male	Female
7 months to 1 year	11 mg	11 mg
1–3 years	7 mg	7 mg
4–8 years	10 mg	10 mg
9–13 years	8 mg	8 mg
14–18 years	11 mg	15 mg
19–50 years	8 mg	18 mg
Over 50 years	8 mg	8 mg
<b>Pregnancy</b>		
All ages	–	27 mg
<b>Lactation</b>		
Under 18 years	–	10 mg
18–50 years	–	9 mg
<b>Vegetarian</b>		
14–18 years	20 mg	27 mg
19–50 years	14 mg	32 mg
Over 50 years	14 mg	14 mg

Some people need more iron, including those who:

- eat a plant-based diet (vegetarian or vegan), or limit animal foods like meat
- do long-distance sports like marathons, triathlons, and cycling
- donate blood often
- have celiac disease
- take hormone replacement therapy
- have heavy menstrual periods



You need more iron when you are pregnant.

- Take a multivitamin with 16–27 mg iron every day.
- Eat a variety of foods.

## Eat enough iron foods daily

Only some of the iron in food is absorbed by your body. Iron is found in:

- meat, poultry, fish, seafood, shellfish, and wild game like moose
- eggs, legumes, dried beans, grains, nuts, iron-fortified grain products, and some vegetables and fruits.

Iron in animal sources, like meat, poultry, and wild game, are absorbed better.

## Tips to get more iron

- Add dried beans, peas, and lentils to soups, salads, casseroles, chili, and sauces.
- Add molasses, nuts, or dried fruit (raisins, dates, or apricots) to cereals and baked goods.
- Choose whole grains and cereals fortified or enriched with iron.
- Cook in cast-iron cookware to add iron to food.
- Drink tea or coffee between meals instead of with meals. Tea and coffee can lower the amount of iron your body absorbs.
- Vitamin C helps your body absorb more iron.
  - Eat foods high in iron with foods high in vitamin C, like:
    - oatmeal with berries on top
    - tuna sandwich with a kale salad
  - Add foods high in vitamin C to high iron foods when cooking. Try adding:
    - tomatoes to bean curry
    - broccoli to chicken stir-fry
  - Good sources of vitamin C include: berries, broccoli, cabbage, cantaloupe, cauliflower, grapefruit, honeydew, kale, kiwi fruit, lemons, oranges, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes.

## Iron supplements

Iron supplements are not for everyone. Take them only if your doctor tells you to. Follow your healthcare team's guidance on timing, type, and dose.



### Too much iron is toxic.

Keep iron supplements and multivitamins with iron out of children's reach.

## More support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://ahs.ca/Nutrition).

## Food sources of iron

Iron amount	Food	Amount
<b>At least 3.5 mg</b>	Chickpeas or lentils, cooked	¾ cup (175 mL)
	Cold cereal, enriched	¾ cup (175 mL)
	Hot cereal, enriched, cooked	¾ cup (175 mL)
	Liver (beef, chicken, or pork)*	2½ oz (75 g)
	Molasses, blackstrap	1 Tbsp (15 mL)
	Moose	2½ oz (75 g)
	Mussels or oysters	2½ oz (75 g)
	Pumpkin seed kernels, roasted	¼ cup (60 mL)
	Soybeans, mature, cooked	¾ cup (175 mL)
<b>At least 2.1 mg</b>	Amaranth, cooked	½ cup (125 mL)
	Beef, elk, or venison	2½ oz (75 g)
	Chard or spinach, boiled	½ cup (125 mL)
	Chia, flax, or sesame seeds	¼ cup (60 mL)
	Lima beans, boiled	½ cup (125 mL)
	Red kidney beans, cooked	¾ cup (175 mL)
	Sardines, canned	2½ oz (75 g)
	Tofu, firm	¾ cup (175 mL)
	Wheat germ	¼ cup (60 mL)
<b>At least 0.7 mg</b>	Asparagus, beets, or green peas, boiled	½ cup (125 mL)
	Bagel or bread, enriched	½ (52 g) bagel or 1 slice (35 g)
	Chicken, lamb, or pork	2½ oz (75 g)
	Clams or light tuna, canned	2½ oz (75 g)
	Dried figs	5 pieces (75 mL)
	Egg	1 large
	Nut butters, like peanut or almond	2 Tbsp (30 mL)
	Oatmeal, pasta, or quinoa, cooked	½ cup (125 mL)
	Potato, baked with skin	½ medium
	Pumpkin, cooked/canned	½ cup (125 mL)
	Split peas	¾ cup (175 mL)

\* Liver is high in vitamin A. If you are pregnant, limit the amount of liver you eat.

