

Iron Deficiency

What is iron?

Iron is used to make haemoglobin, a part of red blood cells which carries oxygen around the body. It is important for healthy growth and brain development, energy and immunity.

Iron is stored in the body as ferritin and is delivered through the body as transferrin.

Iron from food comes in two forms:

Haem – beef, lamb, kangaroo, chicken & fish

Non-Haem – legumes, lentils, fortified cereals/breads, leafy greens, nuts, seeds

Haem iron is better absorbed by the body

Iron deficiency anaemia – when your haemoglobin levels are so low that your blood is unable to deliver enough oxygen to your cells. Symptoms include looking very pale, breathlessness, dizziness, fatigue and poor immune function.

Dietary Strategies

How to improve iron absorption

- Consume iron containing foods with Vitamin C (orange, lemon, pineapple, strawberries, kiwi fruit, tomato, capsicum, broccoli)
- Include Haem and Non-Haem sources in the same meal
- Consume tea and coffee 1-2 hours away from iron sources as they inhibit absorption.

Plant based iron sources

Food source	Per serve
Weet-bix	3.0mg (2 biscuits)
All bran	3.0mg (1/2 cup)
Wholemeal with grain bread	1.7mg (2 slices)
Wholemeal pasta	1.8mg (100g dry)
Brown rice	0.75g (95g dry/ 1/2 cup)
Oats	1.6mg (45g dry/ 1/2 cup)
Quinoa	2.3mg (50g dry / 1/3 cup)
Baked beans	2.1mg (210g/ 1/2 can)
Lentils	5.9mg (65g/ 1/3 cup dry)
Kidney beans	1.6mg (75g/ 1/3 can)
Chickpeas	1.35mg (75g/ 1/3 can)
Tofu	2.35mg (100g)
Spinach	0.5mg (30g/ 1 cup raw)
Silverbeet	1.15mg (50g/ 1 cup raw)
Kale	1.05mg (65g/ 1 cup raw)
Salad leaves	0.55mg (35g/ 1 cup raw)
Pumpkin seeds (pepitas)	1.3mg (15g/ 1 tbsp)
Chia seeds	1.95mg (15g/ 1tbsp)
Sesame seeds	0.5mg (10g/1tbsp)
Almonds	1.1mg (30g)
Cashews	1.5mg (30g)
Pistachios	1.15mg (30g)
Dried Apricots	0.95mg (30g/ 5 pieces)
Dried dates	0.8mg (30g)
Milo	3.6mg (20g)

Animal based iron sources

Food source	Per serve
Beef	3mg (100g)
Kangaroo	3.4mg (100g)
Lamb	2.1mg (100g)
Pork	0.9mg (100g)
Chicken	0.55mg (100g)
Salmon	0.3mg (100g)
Canned Tuna	0.8mg (small can)
Eggs	1.7mg (2 eggs)

Causes of deficiency:

- Not getting enough in the diet
- Blood loss
- Increased need
- Exercise
- Inability to absorb

How much do I need per day? (RDI)

Girls 14-18 years - 15mg
Women 19-50 years - 18mg
Women 50+ years - 8mg
Boys 14-18 years - 11mg
Men 19+years - 8mg

Those consuming a vegetarian/vegan diet should aim to consume 1.8 times the RDI due to the poor absorption of non-haem iron.