

How to Increase Iron in Your Diet

Iron is a mineral that our bodies need for producing energy and for building red blood cells, which carry oxygen. Too little iron, or iron deficiency, can result in:

- fatigue, weakness, poor exercise tolerance
- loss of appetite
- decreased ability to fight infection

If your doctor or Registered Dietitian has told you to increase the amount of iron in your diet, here are some guidelines:

- **Eat more meat, fish and poultry.**
 - Iron found in red meat, dark meat poultry (legs and thighs), liver, pork, and fish is easily absorbed.
- **If you do not eat meat: beans, tofu, iron fortified cereals & grains, egg yolks, nuts, fruits, and leafy greens can also be good sources of iron**
 - But, this form of iron is not as easily absorbed as iron from meat.
 - Try to eat these foods along with good sources of vitamin C (see below)
- **Take vitamin C with your source of iron.**
 - Vitamin C increases absorption of iron. Four ounces (1/2 cup) of orange juice is enough to increase iron absorption.
 - Other sources of vitamin C include citrus fruit, fresh bell peppers, strawberries, cantaloupe, tomatoes, and fresh broccoli
 - Ideas: add tomatoes or bell peppers to a bean salad, eat iron fortified cereal with berries, try broccoli and tofu stir fry
- **Avoid drinking coffee, tea, or red wine with your meals or iron supplements.**
 - Instead, enjoy these beverages between meals. These beverages can decrease the absorption of iron.
- **Avoid eating high-fiber foods or taking a calcium supplement during the same meal as an iron source or with iron supplements.**
 - Fiber and calcium can decrease iron absorption.
- **Follow any instructions given by your healthcare provider regarding iron supplementation**
 - Too much iron can lead to health problems.
 - Your pharmacist, doctor, or Registered Dietitian can tell you which type and amount of supplement is best for you.
- Addition information about iron can be found at:
 - Medline Plus: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002422.htm>
 - Vegetarian Resource Group: <http://www.vrg.org/nutrition/iron.htm>