

**FOOD COMBINATIONS THAT  
HELP YOUR BODY ABSORB  
MORE IRON**

**SIRLOIN STEAK  
with SPINACH SALAD**

**BARBECUED BEEF with  
REFRIED BEANS AND TORTILLAS**

**GROUND BEEF with WHOLE GRAIN ROLL**

**PORK or HAM with BEAN SOUP**

**CHICKEN with BROWN RICE**

**GRAPEFRUIT with BRAN CEREAL**

**STRAWBERRIES with OATMEAL  
and WHOLE WHEAT TOAST**

**ORANGE with  
PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICH  
on WHOLE WHEAT**

**ORANGE JUICE with  
FORTIFIED CEREAL**

Source: National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Iron in Human Nutrition (Chicago, 1998).

**GOOD SOURCES OF VITAMIN C**

**STRAWBERRIES  
ORANGES  
ORANGE JUICE  
GRAPEFRUIT**

**POTATOES  
TOMATOES  
BROCCOLI  
PEA PODS  
CAULIFLOWER**

**CANTALOUPE  
GREEN CHILIES  
GREEN PEPPER  
RED PEPPER  
GRAPEFRUIT  
JUICE**

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Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for Iron

Age	Females (mg/day**)	Males (mg/day**)
0 to 6 months	.27	.27
7 to 12 months	11	11
1 to 3 years	7	7
4 to 8 years	10	10
9 to 13 years	8	8
14 to 18 years	15	11
19 to 50 years	18	8
51+ years	8	8
Pregnant	27	
Lactation		
14 to 18 years	10	
19 to 50 years	9	

\* From the Dietary Reference Intakes, National Academy of Sciences, 2001.  
\*\* Milligrams per day

Recommended Dietary Allowances\* (RDA) for Iron



**AN APPLE  
A DAY**

**Do You  
Need to**

**PUMP  
IRON**

**Into Your  
Diet?**



University of Nevada  
Cooperative Extension

Fact Sheet 99-20 (Replaces 93-60)  
(revised 2009)

Prepared by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and the University of Nevada School of Medicine.

**Why do I need iron?**

Iron's primary role is to carry oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood stream. Iron is also necessary for the production of energy and to strengthen the immune system.

**What happens when I don't get enough iron?**

Iron deficiency can lead to anemia, a serious public health problem. Although it is rarely fatal, it is a major cause of illness and substandard work performance in millions of people. Iron deficiency can result in decreased learning ability in children. Weakness, paleness, fatigue, difficult or labored breathing, and heart palpitations are symptoms of iron deficiency anemia.

**Who is most likely to become iron deficient?**

People with the greatest need for iron, and therefore the greatest chance of not getting enough, include growing children and adolescents, menstruating women and pregnant women. Iron is required for growth of new body tissue including red blood cells. It is also needed to replace blood cells lost through menstruation.

**What are the best sources of iron?**

The very best sources of iron are meats. This includes beef, pork, lamb, fish, shellfish and chicken. Between 15 and 35 percent of iron from these sources is absorbed, depending on

the level of body iron stores. Iron absorption is increased during iron deficiency.

**Can I get enough iron if I don't eat much meat?**

Beans, legumes, and whole grain, enriched and fortified products are also reasonable sources of iron when eaten frequently and in large serving sizes. The problem with these foods is that the iron is in a form not easily absorbed. In fact, only 3 to 8 percent of iron from these sources is absorbed. The good news is that vitamin C greatly enhances iron absorption from these foods. If a source of vitamin C or a small amount of meat is consumed with the beans, legumes and grain products, iron absorption is increased. Good sources of vitamin C include red and green peppers, cantaloupe, oranges, strawberries, tomatoes, and broccoli.

**Are there foods that block iron absorption?**

Yes. Some things in the diet actually block iron absorption. Tea with meals can significantly decrease the amount of iron that is absorbed.

How much iron do you need?	Milligrams needed daily*	
	Females	Males
Adults (19 to 50 yrs)	18	8
Older adults (51+ yrs)	8	8
Pregnant women	27	
Lactation	9-10	
See back table for more age groups		

\* Recommended Dietary Allowances, 2001.

**IRON CONTENT OF SELECTED FOODS+**

**ANIMAL SOURCES \***

Though animal sources of iron are absorbed by the body better than plant sources, you can increase absorption by consuming a food high in vitamin C at the same meal.

	Milligrams
<b>Beef</b>	
Beef liver, cooked, 3 oz.	5.8
Beef, chuck roast, 3 oz.	3.0
Sirloin, cooked, 3 oz.	3.0
Top round, cooked, 3 oz.	2.5
Ground, lean, cooked, 3 oz.	2.4
<b>Pork</b>	
Tenderloin, cooked, 3 oz.	1.0
Ham, boneless, 3 oz.	1.0
<b>Lamb</b>	
Loin, cooked, 3 oz.	2.1
<b>Veal</b>	
Loin, cooked, 3 oz.	0.7
<b>Venison</b>	
Venison (deer), cooked, 3 oz.	3.8
<b>Chicken</b>	
Breast, cooked, 3 oz.	0.9
<b>Fish</b>	
Tuna, light, 3 oz.	1.3
Flounder/sole, cooked, 3 oz.	0.3
<b>Shellfish</b>	
Clams, canned, ¼ cup	11.2
Clams, smoked, canned, 6 small	10.8
Oysters, canned, ½ cup	5.4
Oysters, cooked, 6 medium	4.6
Oysters, canned, 6 medium	3.2

\* From 15 to 35 percent of iron from these sources is absorbed.

**Brand names are used for illustration purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement by Cooperative Extension.**

**PLANT SOURCES \*\***

Iron from plant sources is poorly absorbed. Increase absorption by consuming a food containing vitamin C at the same meal.

Grains	Milligrams
<u>Cereal, ready to eat, fortified</u>	
Kellogg's Product 19, 1 cup	18.0
General Mills Total, ¾ cup	18.0
General Mills Multigrain Cheerios, 1 cup	18.0
Ralston Wheat Chex, 1 cup	18.0
Malt-O-Meal, fortified, 1 cup	17.2
Quaker Corn Bran, ¾ cup	8.1
Kellogg's/Post Bran Flakes, ¾ cup	8.1
Oatmeal, instant, fortified, 1 packet	10.6
General Mills Cheerios, 1 cup	8.9
Kellogg's/Post/Ralston Raisin Bran, 1 cup	7.5
Kellogg's All-Bran, ½ cup	4.5
Wheat germ, toasted, 2 Tbs	2.6
<b>Beans and peas</b>	
Baked beans, cooked, 1 cup	5.0
Navy beans, cooked, 1 cup	4.3
Pinto beans, cooked, 1 cup	3.6
Lima beans, cooked, 1 cup	4.5
Split pea soup, 1 cup	2.2
Lentil and ham soup, 1 cup	2.7
Burrito, bean, 1	2.5
Black-eyed peas, cooked, 1 cup	3.6
Tofu, firm, ½ cup	3.4
Tofu, soft, ½ cup	2.8

<b>Seeds</b>	
Pistachios, dried, shelled, ¼ cup	1.3
Sunflower seed kernels, dried, ¼ cup	2.3

<b>Other</b>	
Molasses, blackstrap, 1 tablespoon	3.5
Baked potato w/skin, 1 medium	1.9

+ Iron content data from product Nutrition Facts labels and from the USDA National Nutrient Database at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search>.

\*\* Between 3 and 8 percent of iron from these sources is absorbed.