

Iron for children

This resource has information to help your child increase iron in their diet.

Why do we need iron?

Iron is an important mineral found in the blood. It is responsible for transporting the air we breathe in (i.e. oxygen) around the body. This is needed for your body to function.

How to make sure your child is getting the right amount of iron

Infants should be introduced to iron rich foods as soon as they start on solid foods. This is usually around six months of age. Children should eat a wide range of foods which contain iron every day.

If your child is not eating enough iron rich foods, they may develop iron deficiency anaemia. This term describes low iron levels in the blood. This may explain if your child is very tired, out of breath and has ongoing poor appetite.

Recommended daily iron requirements

	Age	mg/day
Boys and Girls	1–3 yrs	9
Boys and Girls	4–8 yrs	10
Boys and Girls	9–13 yrs	8
Boys	14–18 yrs	11
Girls	14–18 yrs	15

Children at risk of low iron stores include:

- Infants with late introduction of solids (i.e. > 6 months).
- Children who drink large volumes of milk may not be hungry to eat foods (including iron rich foods).
- Picky/fussy eaters who have limited range of food in their diet.
- Children born premature.
- Children who are vegetarian/vegan/restrictive diets.

The two types of iron found in your diet

Haem iron	Non-haem iron
Found in animal foods and is well absorbed by the body.	Found in plant foods and is not as well absorbed .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meats such as beef, lamb or pork• Poultry such as chicken or turkey• Fish and shellfish such as sardines, salmon, or tuna• Offal such as liver and kidney	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wholegrain breads and cereals• Iron fortified breakfast cereals• Legumes including baked beans, dried peas, beans, and lentils• Green leafy vegetables• Dried fruit• Eggs• Peanut butter• Nuts (<i>whole nuts are not recommended for children under 3 years</i>)**

** Risk of choking for children < 3 years

How to improve iron absorption

Eat Vitamin C rich foods to help iron absorption.

Choose Vitamin C rich foods such as:

- Citrus fruits (e.g. orange, lemon, mandarins)
- Tropical fruits (e.g. pineapple, kiwifruit, papaya)
- Berries (e.g. strawberries, raspberries)
- Vegetables (e.g. capsicum, tomatoes, cabbage, celery, broccoli)

Avoid giving your child too much milk. Milk contains very little iron. Milk contains calcium which lowers the amount of iron to be absorbed.

Iron Supplements

Your child may need iron supplements if their iron stores are too low. Take these as per medical advice and continue with providing iron rich foods. Iron from supplements can be harmful in large doses. Keep iron supplements tightly capped and out of children's reach.

**Only give iron supplements to your child on medical advice (i.e. Doctor).
Talk to your doctor if you think your child may have low iron level.**

Try some of these ideas to boost your child's iron intake

- Choose a breakfast cereal with added iron eg. Iron fortified infant cereal, Weetbix. Add some fruit to help iron absorption.
- Spread peanut butter or hummus on toast or crackers.
- Thicken homemade soups with dried peas, beans or lentils.
- Use wholegrain bread rather than white bread.
- Try some dried fruit or nuts at snack time (*whole nuts are not recommended for children under 3 years*)**
- Serve baked beans, ham, tuna, BBQ chicken on wholemeal/wholegrain toast.
- Serve vegetables high in Vitamin C at meal times (e.g. capsicum, tomato, cabbage, celery, broccoli).

**** Risk of choking for children < 3 years**

Things I can do to improve my child's iron intake:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Dietitian contact details:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Iron content of common foods

Food	Average serve size	Iron (mg)	Food	Average serve size	Iron (mg)
Meat / Fish / Chicken			Pasta cooked	100g	0.5
Lean Beef or Lamb	100g	2–3	Brown rice cooked	½ cup	0.4
Chicken / Turkey / Pork	100g	1.0	White bread	1 slice	0.3
Tuna / Salmon	100g	1.0	White rice cooked	½ cup	0.3
Egg	1 large	1.0			
			Vegetables		
Meat alternatives			Spinach (raw)	100g	3.0
Chickpeas	100g	6.2	Beetroot	3 slices	1.2
Tofu	100g	5.2	Asparagus	5 spears	1.0
Soy beans	½ cup	2.5	Green beans	½ cup	1.0
Lentils	100g	2.0			
Baked beans	100g	1.6	Fruit		
Dried cooked beans	100g	1.5	Prune juice	180ml	2.5
Kidney beans	100g	1.3	Dried Apricots	5 halves	0.8
Tahini	1 tbsp	1.3	Dried Sultanas	1 tbsp	0.3
Pâté	1 tbsp	0.7	Fresh fruit	1 small	0.2-0.7
Hummus	1 tbsp	0.4			
			Snack foods and drinks		
Grains and cereals			Milo®	1 tbsp	2.0
Special K®	45g	7.0	Ovaltine®	1 tbsp	1.4
Iron fortified infant cereal	5 tbsp	5.2	Cashews**	10–20 nuts	1.2
Weet–bix®	2 biscuits	2.6	Almonds**	10–15 nuts	0.5
Muesli	1/3 cup	2.0	Peanut Butter	1 tbsp	0.5
Wholemeal/multigrain bread	1 slice	0.7	Custard	½ cup	0.4

** Risk of choking for children < 3 years

Example meal plan

<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Iron fortified rice cereal ✓ Weetbix® <p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strawberries ✓ Raspberries 	<p>BREAKFAST</p> <p>Cereal with milk <i>OR</i> 1 slice toast <i>AND</i></p> <p>fresh fruit or dried fruit</p>	<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wholegrain/multigrain bread <p>Top with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Peanut butter ✓ Baked beans ✓ Egg
	<p>MORNING TEA</p> <p>Crackers</p> <p><i>OR</i></p> <p>1 tub fruit yoghurt</p>	<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Hummus ✓ Tahini ✓ Egg <p>WITH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tomato
<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wholegrain/multigrain bread 	<p>LUNCH</p> <p>Sandwiches</p> <p><i>AND</i></p> <p>Fruit <i>OR</i> custard</p>	<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Baked beans ✓ Egg ✓ Chicken ✓ Cheese ✓ Pâté
<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sultanas ✓ Apricots <p>WITH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Orange ✓ Pineapples ✓ Strawberries ✓ Raspberries ✓ Kiwifruit 	<p>AFTERNOON TEA</p> <p>Fresh fruit or dried fruit <i>AND</i></p> <p>Nuts</p>	<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cashews** ✓ Almonds** ✓ Peanuts** <p><i>** Risk of choking for children < 3 years</i></p>
<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Beef ✓ Pork ✓ Chicken ✓ Fish ✓ Chickpeas ✓ Tofu ✓ Mixed beans 	<p>DINNER/TEA</p> <p>Roast meat / meat alternatives</p> <p><i>AND</i></p> <p>Vegetables</p> <p><i>AND</i></p> <p>Mashed potato <i>OR</i> pumpkin</p>	<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Spinach ✓ Beetroot ✓ Asparagus ✓ Green beans <p>WITH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Capsicum ✓ Broccoli ✓ Celery ✓ Tomato ✓ Cabbage
<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Milo® ✓ Ovaltine® 	<p>SUPPER</p> <p>Milk drink</p>	