



Are you feeling tired and irritable?

You may not be getting enough iron

Feeling sleepy? Irritable? Are you having a hard time concentrating at work? If that describes how you're feeling, your body may be low on iron.

Iron is an essential mineral that builds your body's hemoglobin cells and helps them work. When your body's iron level is low, you may feel like your get up and go, got up and went.

Are you at risk for iron deficiency?

Everyone can have low iron, but it's most common in women and children. Children's iron needs are high because their bodies are growing, and women's needs are high because of monthly blood loss.

How much iron do you need?

The amount of iron that you need depends on your age and your gender. The recommended daily amounts of iron are:

- Children (ages 1-10): 7 to 10 mg per day
- Teen Girls (ages 14-18): 15 mg per day
- Women (ages 19-50): 18 mg per day
- Pregnant Women: 27 mg per day **
- Breastfeeding Women: 9 to 10 mg per day
- Men (ages 19 and older): 8 mg per day

** During pregnancy, women need more iron for proper growth and development of the fetus.

Which foods provide iron?

There are two types of iron – heme and non-heme. Heme iron is absorbed better by the body and comes from animal sources such as beef, lamb, pork, turkey, chicken, fish and eggs.

Non-heme iron is not absorbed as easily by the body and comes from green leafy vegetables, dried fruit, breakfast cereals, legumes such as beans and lentils, whole grain bread and whole grain pastas. Foods high in vitamin C, such as tomatoes, broccoli, strawberries, oranges and fruit juice, help your body to absorb non-heme iron.

How can I add more iron to my diet?

Here are some easy ways to increase your iron intake:

- Include at least one iron rich food and one food rich in vitamin C at each meal
- Eat red meat at least once a week – it's loaded with iron
- Have pasta with meat sauce instead of cream sauce
- Limit coffee and tea with meals because it decreases the body's ability to use iron
- Eat at least one dark green vegetable every day
- Choose breakfast cereals fortified with iron

Other great ideas include: chicken or beef stir-fries full of vegetables, adding cooked beans or lentils to soup, stews and casseroles, and adding raisins or dried fruit to your cereal.

Look for iron on your food labels

Learning to read food labels can help ensure that your family gets the nutrients they need. Is the better choice a hotdog or a cup of spaghetti with tomato based meat sauce?

Hot Dog

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 weiner (37g)	Daily Value
Iron	2%
Vitamin C	0%

Spaghetti with tomato based meat sauce

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 cup (250ml)	Daily Value
Iron	40%
Vitamin C	35%

- Spaghetti with tomato based meat sauce is a great source of iron because it contains both heme and non-heme iron.

Want more information on iron? Visit the Dietitians of Canada website at www.dietitians.ca

Article by Rosemary Szabadka RD, Community Nutritionist, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Heather Johansson 4th year Human Nutritional Science Student, University of Manitoba