

IRON IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD HEALTH

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Have you ever been “turned down” for donating blood? Occasionally, people are not able to give blood due to low hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is the chemical substance in red blood cells that captures and holds oxygen after circulating throughout the lungs, and then carries this oxygen throughout our bodies to every tissue. This oxygen is then used for cell growth and development. Lack of iron is the most common nutritional deficiency in the world. Iron consumption is also low in the American diet, especially in children 1 to 2 years old, in women ages 12-50; men and boys can also become low in iron. The average man needs 10-18mg of dietary iron and the average woman needs 18 or more mg of iron daily.

A deficiency of iron can cause a condition known as anemia. Anemia is characterized by low levels of hemoglobin. Your doctor can determine your hemoglobin level by a simple blood test.

The main cause of dietary iron deficiency is not eating enough iron-rich foods. There are two different types of iron in food: 1) hemo iron, found in red meat, seafood and poultry, and 2) non-hemo iron, found in breads, fruits, breakfast cereals, vegetables, legumes (e.g. baked beans), nuts and eggs. Hemo iron foods are rich in iron and contain iron in a form that is easily absorbed by the body. Red meat can boost the absorption of the non-hemo iron by up to 4 times. Vitamin C also has a similar positive effect on the absorption of iron. In other words, the key to a healthy iron-rich diet is to eat a combination of iron-rich foods, high in both hemo and non-hemo iron. Vegetarians or those of us who must limit the amount of red meat we eat can get our iron by eating very lean meat, beans, whole grains, spinach and dried fruits. Most breakfast cereals are fortified with iron. *Total™* cereal, oatmeal and Cream of Wheat™ are good cereal choices for iron content. Check the food labels on the box and look for the iron under the daily values. Add additional raisins to your cereal and you will boost the amount of iron you are consuming!

Good vegetable choices are any green leafy vegetables, a small baked potato with the skin on it, broccoli, and peas. Other foods containing iron are dates, prunes and raisins, molasses, wheat germ, sunflower seeds and nuts. Another tip is to avoid drinking tea with your meals that are high in iron as tea contains tannin that will inhibit the absorption of iron. Dairy products may also inhibit iron absorption if ingested within two hours of consuming iron-rich foods.

If all else fails and your blood tests still indicate that you need more iron in your diet, your physician may want you to take an iron supplement. Some of the side effects of iron supplements are nausea, constipation and black colored stools. Try taking your supplement with food, drinking plenty of fluids and water, and eat fiber-rich foods.