

What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that helps red blood cells carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Children need iron to grow. Iron deficiency anemia can happen when a child does not eat enough iron. A child with this type of anemia may be tired and get sick more often than normal. It may also keep your child from growing as they should.

What are iron-rich foods?

Super Iron Sources Give your child 1 or more each day	Good Iron Sources Give 2 to 3 each day	Fair Iron Sources Give 2 to 3 each day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef • Hamburger • Venison • Turkey • Chicken • Fish • White or kidney beans • Lentils • Tofu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oatmeal • Cereals (fortified with 45% or more of the Daily Value of iron)* • Quinoa • Whole wheat bread • Enriched pasta, rice, or bread* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prunes • Raisins • Tomatoes • Green Peas • Peanut Butter • Nuts and seeds • Spinach • Baked Potatoes • Sweet Potatoes • Broccoli

*Enriched or fortified foods have nutrients like iron added to increase the nutritional content.

Note: If your child follows a vegetarian diet, they may not absorb as much iron from their foods. Follow the tips below to help them absorb as much as iron as possible.

Mealtime tips

- Do not let your child drink too much milk. It is not a good source of iron. The calcium in milk may make it hard for iron to be absorbed by the body. Ask your child's doctor or dietitian how much milk is right for their age.
- Add foods that are rich in iron to other foods to boost iron content. Try adding beans or lentils to hamburger, meatloaf, or casseroles. Add oatmeal to cookie batter.

Vitamin C helps

Vitamin C helps the body use iron. To get more iron from non-meat foods, iron-containing foods with Vitamin C rich foods.

Sources of Vitamin C:

- Oranges
- Potatoes
- Broccoli, Spinach & Cabbage
- Strawberries & Blueberries
- Grapefruit
- Tomatoes & Tomato juice
- Watermelon & Cantaloupe
- Green Peppers
- Collard greens & Mustard greens

Good Combinations for Vitamin C and non-meat iron:

- Fortified cereal and grapefruit
- Oatmeal with strawberries on top
- Infant rice cereal with pureed fruit
- Bean tacos with tomatoes
- Spaghetti with tomato sauce
- Spanish rice
- Grilled cheese & tomato soup
- Baked potato with salsa
- Stuffed green peppers with beans
- Cereal bars made with fruit
- Macaroni and cheese with broccoli
- Vegetable stir-fry with enriched rice
- Peanut butter toast & fruit jam

Reading food labels

- See the **Daily Iron Needs for Children** chart below.
- In general, foods that contain 15 to 20% of the total Daily Value of iron are good sources.

Daily Iron Needs for Children

Age	Mg Iron Needed Each Day
0 to 6 months	0.27 mg
7 to 12 months	11 mg
1 to 3 years	7 mg
4 to 8 years	10 mg
9 to 13 years	8 mg
14 to 18 years (male)	11 mg
14 to 18 years (female)	15 mg

Supplements

- Though not necessary for most children, some may need a multivitamin or iron supplement to prevent deficiency.
- Babies fed human milk have enough iron stores to last them until 4 to 6 months old. After this age, talk with your baby's doctor to see if they need an iron supplement. Infants given iron-fortified formula or iron-rich foods typically do not need an iron supplement.
- Talk to your child's doctor or dietitian before starting any supplements.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.