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SP505-B Choose Foods With Iron

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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Choose Foods With Iron

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Why is iron important?

Iron is important for making red blood cells that carry oxygen through the body.

Consuming enough iron may –

- Help you feel like you have more energy.
- Help you resist infections.
- Help children grow and increase their ability to learn.

In addition, pregnant women need iron to make red blood cells for themselves and their growing baby, as well as replacing blood lost during delivery. Iron deficiency during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage.

How much iron is enough?

Women and children are prone to iron deficiency because they need extra amounts during rapid periods of growth and during childbearing years. Iron requirements for children increase as they grow older, from 7 milligrams a day for the 1- to 3-year-old to 15 milligrams a day for girls in their teens. Pregnant women need 27 milligrams a day.

Men need less iron than women. From age 9 on, they need 8 milligrams daily and during the rapid growth years (ages 14-18), they need 11 milligrams a day.

How can you get enough iron?

- Eat foods with iron.
- Eat foods fortified or enriched with iron.
- Take a vitamin and mineral supplement with iron.

Foods with iron

- Liver
- Lean meat
- Poultry and fish
- Dried beans and peas
- Blackstrap molasses
- Tofu
- Green leafy vegetables
- Raisins
- Whole-wheat bread

Foods fortified or enriched with iron

- Iron-fortified, ready-to-eat breakfast cereals
- Iron-fortified oatmeal
- Enriched grits
- Enriched breads



Iron supplements

Not everyone needs a supplement. Supplements with iron may be indicated when diet alone cannot provide enough iron to restore iron to a healthy level. If you are pregnant, in your childbearing years, or have a child that you suspect may not be getting enough iron from his or her diet, ask your healthcare provider to check for iron deficiency. Men and postmenopausal women should only take iron supplements when prescribed by a physician because of a greater risk of iron overload.

Read the nutrition facts for iron

Any food that has nutrients added must provide nutrition facts for those nutrients on the label. The nutrition facts on a box of instant oatmeal looks like the information below.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 packet (45g)	
Servings per container 8	
	Amount per serving (cereal alone)
Calories	160
Calories from fat	25
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 3g	4%
Saturated Fat 0.5g	3%
Trans Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 1g	
Monounsaturated Fat 1g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 260mg	11%
Potassium 150mg	4%
Total Carbohydrate 29g	10%
Dietary Fiber 6g	23%
Soluble Fiber 4g	
Sugars 1g	
Protein 7g	10%
Vitamin A	20%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	10%
Iron	20%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	

Test your label reading –

Look at the sample Nutrition Facts for oatmeal and answer the following questions.

How much of this cereal is considered a serving?

How much iron is in a serving of this cereal?

Check your answers below.

Can you get too much iron?

It is unlikely that you will get too much iron from food. However, it is possible to get too much from supplements. Look for supplements with no more than 100 percent of the daily value for iron unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise.

Be sure to keep dietary supplements away from children. A child can be poisoned from just a few pills with iron.

Tips for increasing iron

- Choose three or more good sources of iron each day.
- Combine foods with vitamin C with fortified or enriched cereals and breads, dried beans and peas, green leafy vegetables and other plant foods with iron. Vitamin C helps the body use the iron in these foods.
- Combine small amounts of meat with grains and vegetables.

“Choose Foods with Iron” is one in a series of publications to help you select and prepare healthy foods.

For more information about food and nutrition, contact your local Extension office.

Answers to Label Reading
 How much of this cereal is considered a serving? 1 packet
 How much iron is in a serving of this cereal? 20% of the Daily Value.

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