

Food Fact - Iron for Growth

What is Iron?

Iron is a mineral which occurs in a variety of foods. It is especially important in childhood as it is needed to carry oxygen around the body in the blood and is vital for growth.

Not having enough iron is known as Iron Deficiency Anaemia and it is the most common nutritional deficiency in childhood.

This can result in:

- Poor growth
- Lack of concentration
- Poor appetite
- Lethargy / tiredness
- Frequent infections
- Breathlessness

As our bodies cannot make iron it is important that we take in enough of it from the foods we eat.

How Much Iron Do Children Need?

The amount of iron needed varies with age and gender.

The following table is useful as a guide to the quantities of iron to aim for per day:

Iron per Day (mg/day)		
Age	Boys (mg)	Girls (mg)
0-3 months	1.7	1.7
4-6 months	4.3	4.3
7-12 months	7.8	7.8
1-3 years	6.9	6.9
4-6 years	6.1	6.1
7-10 years	8.7	8.7
11-18 years	11.3	14.8

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Where Does Iron Come From?

The richest sources of iron are meat products. This type of iron is better absorbed by the body. Vegetable sources of iron are less well absorbed, but contain valuable amounts. The following table shows the amount of iron in different foods:

	Quantity	Food	Iron (mg)
Meat and alternatives	1 (60g)	Beefburger	1.5
	1 (50g)	Egg	1.0
	80g small breast	Chicken	0.4
	1 thin slice (38g)	Corned beef	1.0
	40g (1 filling)	Pate	2.4
	100g	Beef Mince	1.4
	90g	Roast Lamb	1.4
	90g	Roast Beef	2.6
	2 (80g)	Sausages	1.0
Fish	2 (56g)	Fish fingers	0.4
	125g can	Sardines in tomato sauce	3.6
	100g	Salmon	0.5
	46g	Tuna	0.5
Cereals	25g	Puffed rice/corn cereal	2.0
	2	Wheat biscuit cereal	4.8
	1 slice	White bread	0.6
	1 slice	Wholemeal bread	0.9
Pulses	1 small tin (150g)	Baked beans	2.0
	50g	Chick peas	0.7
	3tbs (40g)	Garden peas	0.6
	1tbs	Lentils	1.4
	20g/1 tsp	Peanut butter	0.4
	50g	Red kidney beans	1.3
	60g	Quorn	0.4
Fruit	4 (32g)	Dried Apricots	1.1
	1 tablespoon	Raisins	1.1
	1 large slice (200g)	Watermelon	0.6
Vegetables	1 small	Baked potato + skin	0.7
	2 spears	Broccoli	0.9
	1 tablespoon	Spinach – cooked	0.6

How can I improve iron absorption?

To help the absorption of plant sources of iron, meals should include sources of Vitamin C.

Foods rich in vitamin C are:

- Fruit, especially citrus and strawberries.
- Vegetables, especially green peppers, broccoli and cabbage
- Fruit juice – offer 1 glass per day only

Tannin (the brown colouring) in tea can also reduce iron absorption so it is best avoided in children.

SAMPLE MENU (meeting the requirements of an 8-year old)

Breakfast

2 Weetabix with milk
Orange juice

Lunch

Tuna sandwich (with 2 slices white bread)
Satsuma
Handful of raisins

Evening meal

Spaghetti bolognaise

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