



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

Accredited by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc.
www.health.umd.edu

Dietary Approaches to Iron-Deficiency Anemia

What Causes Iron-Deficiency Anemia?

This anemia can be caused by serious medical problems, such as blood loss. It is important to see your doctor if you are anemic, and to follow your doctor's advice.

Many cases of anemia are simple. Anemia is often caused by poor eating patterns and can be cured by better eating habits.

Common causes of iron-deficiency anemia in otherwise healthy young people include a low iron intake and poor absorption of iron due to a lack of fruits and vegetables or due to a habit of drinking tea, coffee or cola with meals.

How Can I Change My Eating Habits to Improve my Iron Status?

First, be sure that you are consuming an adequate amount of iron. Government guidelines recommend 18 mg. per day for all healthy women under the age of 50. Several times each day, consume foods that are good sources of iron, along with foods that are good sources of vitamin C (turn the page over for a list of good sources of both).

Animal flesh is a good source of well-absorbed iron. Milk, milk products, and eggs are **poor** sources of iron.

Whole wheat, wheat germ, beans, peas, and some fruits contain significant amounts of iron, but the iron in plant products is not well absorbed.

Consuming small amounts of meats and a source of vitamin C with these foods **greatly improves** the absorption of the iron.

If you are anemic, you should include a food that is a good source of vitamin C every time you eat. Many fruits and vegetables contain significant amounts of vitamin C. Citrus fruits and dark green vegetables are especially good sources. Melons and berries also contain useful amounts of vitamin C.

Vitamin C is destroyed by cooking, canning, and exposure to the air. The vitamin C values given in the following table estimate the amount of vitamin C, assuming reasonable care to avoid over-cooking. The longer cut-up fruit sits exposed to air, the less vitamin C it has.

The use of cast-iron skillets and pots for cooking can also add significant amounts of iron to food; particularly if the food is acidic, such as tomatoes.

What Not to Eat

Some beverages contain substances that *prevent* the absorption of iron. If you are anemic, do not drink tea, coffee, red wine or cola with food. Wait at least an hour after eating to drink these beverages. (Water and milk are neutral with regard to iron absorption. Juices rich in vitamin C will *improve* the absorption of the iron in the food.)

- Over -

Published for the University of Maryland community.

This paper is made from 30% post consumer waste. Don't let the cycle stop here, please recycle this after you recover.

Estimated Vitamin C Content in Selected Foods

Food	Amount	VIT C (mg)
honeydew melon, fresh	1 cup	95
orange juice canned/frozen	8 oz	85-100
orange, fresh	1 medium	60-80
grapefruit juice	8 oz.	70-80
kiwi fruit, fresh	1 medium	75
strawberries, raw/frozen	1 cup	60-80
cantaloupe, fresh	1 cup	65-70
grapefruit, fresh	1/2	40-50
V-8 juice	6 oz	35-40
raspberries, raw/frozen	1/2 cup	20-30
watermelon, fresh	1 cup	15
sweet peppers, raw/cooked	1/2 cup	60-75
broccoli, raw/cooked	1/2 cup	40-50
cauliflower, raw/cooked	1/2 cup	35
baked sweet potato with skin	1 small	30
baked potato with skin	1 medium	25
red cabbage, raw/cooked	1/2 cup	20-25
tomato, raw	1 medium	20
kale, cooked	1/2 cup	15-30
hot chilis, raw	1	109
hot chilis, canned	1/2 cup	46

Approximate Iron Content of Selected Foods

Food	Amount	Iron(mg)	Calories
chicken liver, simmered	3.5 oz	8.5	160
beef liver	3.5 oz	6.8	160-220
lean hamburger	3.5 oz	3.0	260-275
ham	3.5 oz	1.3	200-230
almonds	20-22	3.3	165-175
sesame seeds, toasted	1 oz	4.2	160
black beans, canned	1/2 cup	2.3	110
pinto beans, canned	1/2 cup	1.9	90-95
kidney beans, canned	1/2 cup	1.6	105-110
chickpeas, canned	1/2 cup	1.6	145
green peas, canned/frozen	1/2 cup	1.2	60-70
pasta/macaroni, cooked	1 cup	2.0	200
rice, brown or white, cooked	1 cup	1.4	200
wheat germ, toasted	1/4 cup	2.3	108
whole wheat bread	2 slices	1.7	120
oatmeal, cooked	2/3 cup	1.1	110
cereal, ready-to-eat	1 oz	1.0-1.8	110
dried apricots	5 whole	1.7	85
dried prunes	5 whole	1.0	100