

# Getting Iron from Your Food

## What Is Iron?

Iron is a mineral that your body needs to stay healthy. It forms part of your red blood cells, which carry oxygen to your body.

Eating enough iron helps prevent anemia (when you don't have enough iron in your blood).

There are two types of iron:

- **Nonheme iron** is the most common type of iron. It is harder for your body to absorb.
- **Heme iron** is only found in meat (beef, poultry, fish etc.). It is much easier for your body to absorb.

## How Much Iron Do I Need to Eat?

- **If you're not pregnant and you're of childbearing age**, you should eat 15-18mg of iron per day.
- **If you are pregnant**, you should eat 27mg per day.
- **If you are breastfeeding** (before your period starts), you should eat 9-10mg per day.
- **If you have gone through menopause**, you should eat 8mg per day.

On the next few pages, you will find a list of foods and how much iron is in each food.

## What If I Am Vegetarian?

If you are vegetarian (or if you only eat nonheme sources of iron) **double the amounts listed above**. For example, if you're pregnant you should eat 54mg per day.

## Get the Most Out of Your Food

Getting enough iron is not only about **how many** iron-rich foods you eat, but also **how** you eat your food. Following these tips can help your body absorb the iron that you eat:

- ☑ Eat nonheme iron with a little meat or Vitamin C. Some foods with Vitamin C are oranges and other citrus fruits, kiwis, and green chile.
- ✗ Try not to eat nonheme iron while drinking coffee or tea.
- ✗ Try not to eat nonheme iron with calcium (milk, cheese, yogurt).



Dark meat, liver, beans, and cooked spinach are all good sources of iron.

**If you are vegetarian, double these amounts!**



## How Much Iron Is In Your Food?

Below are lists of common foods with heme iron and common foods with nonheme iron. They show how many milligrams (mg) of iron are in each food. In each section, the foods are listed in order of how much iron they have.

Some foods have a range of milligrams of iron. For meats, the ranges mean that the amount of iron depends on the **part eaten** or the **type of animal**. For cereals, the ranges mean that the amount of iron depends on the **brand** or **flavor** of the cereal.

Foods that are not on these lists may include:

- Uncommon foods with high iron levels
- Foods with low iron levels

Check the labels of your food for the most accurate iron amounts. If you want to look up more foods, go to the USDA website: <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search>

### Foods with Heme Iron

#### Organ Meats – 3oz cooked

- Liver: 4-26mg – see red box below
- Heart: 4-8mg
- Kidneys: 3-11mg
- Gizzards: 3mg
- Tongue: 2-4mg
- Stomach (menudo): 1mg

#### Meats and Poultry – 3oz cooked

- Antelope: 4mg
- Goat: 3mg
- Buffalo or Bison: 2-4 mg
- Deer or Venison: 3-4mg
- Elk: 2-3mg
- Beef: 1-3mg
- Lamb: 2mg
- Pork: 1-2mg
- Turkey leg or thigh: 1-2mg
- Chicken leg or thigh: 1mg
- Chicken breast: 1mg
- Turkey breast: 1mg

#### Processed Meats – 3oz (limit foods from this group because they're very salty)

- Liver sausage (braunschweiger, liverwurst, pâté): 5-9mg – see red box below
- Hot dogs: 1-3mg
- Pork sausage: 1-2mg
- Bologna: 1mg
- Ham: 1mg

#### Fish and Shellfish – 3oz cooked

- Octopus: 8mg
- Blue mussels: 6mg
- Oysters: 6-8mg
- Clams: 2mg
- Sardines: 2mg
- Shrimp: 2mg or less
- Trout: 2mg or less
- Tuna: 1mg

**If you are pregnant** and you are in your first three months of pregnancy, do not eat liver or liverwurst more than 1 or 2 times a month. Make sure you only eat small amounts.



## Foods with Nonheme Iron

### Beans – ½ cup cooked

- White beans: 3-4mg
- Lentils: 3mg
- Kidney beans: 2-3mg
- Kidney bean cooking liquid: 2mg
- Mature lima beans: 2mg
- Black beans: 2mg
- Navy beans: 2mg
- Canned refried beans: 2mg
- Great northern beans: 2mg
- Pinto beans: 2mg
- Soybeans: 2mg
- Black-eyed peas: 1-2mg
- Garbanzo beans (chickpeas): 1-2mg

### Grains and Starches

- Rice bran, dry, ¼ cup: 5mg
- Amaranth, cooked, ½ cup: 3mg
- Wheat germ, dry, ¼ cup: 2mg
- Spelt, cooked, ½ cup: 2mg
- Wheat bran, dry, ¼ cup: 2mg
- Quinoa, cooked, ½ cup: 1mg
- 1 Flour tortilla: 1-2mg
- 1 slice of white bread: 1mg
- Enriched white rice, cooked, ½ cup: 1mg
- Whole wheat pasta, cooked, ½ cup: 1mg
- Egg noodles, cooked, ½ cup: 1mg
- Bulgur, cooked, ½ cup: 1mg
- Millet, cooked, ½ cup: 1 mg

### Soy

- Soy protein isolate, 1oz: 4mg
- Tofu, ½ cup: 1-7mg
- Tempeh, ½ cup: 2mg
- Edamame, cooked, ½ cup: 2mg
- Soy milk, 1 cup: 1mg
- Soy nuts, 1oz: 1mg

### Breakfast Cereals –Check the labels for the most accurate information.

- All-Bran Complete Wheat Flakes®, ¾ cup: 18mg
- Product 19®, 1 cup: 18mg
- Total®, ¾ cup: 18mg
- Honey Nut Shredded Wheat®, 1 cup: 17mg
- Oatmeal Squares®, 1 cup: 16mg
- Grape Nuts®, ½ cup: 16mg
- Malt-o-Meal®, cooked, 1 cup: 14-15mg
- Cream of Wheat®, cooked, 1 cup: 9-13mg
- Chex®, ¾-1cup: 8-14mg
- Raisin Bran®, 1 cup: 7-11mg
- Fiber One®, ½-1cup: 5-14mg
- Instant oatmeal, cooked, 1cup: 4-14mg
- Honey Bunches of Oats®, ¾ cup: 8-10mg
- Rice Krispies®, 1 cup: 9mg
- Special K, 1 cup: 9mg
- Frosted Flakes®, ¾ cup: 8mg
- Cheerios®, ¾-1cup: 6-9mg
- GoLean Crisp Cinnamon Crumble®, ¾ cup: 2mg
- Regular oatmeal, cooked, 1 cup: 2mg



### Vegetables – ½ cup

- Spinach, cooked: 3mg
- Beet greens: 1mg
- Collard greens: 1mg
- Tomato, cooked: 1-2mg
- Peas: 1mg
- Sweet potatoes: 1mg
- Beets: 1mg
- Mustard greens: 1mg
- Turnip greens: 1mg
- Kale: 1mg

### Fruits and Juices – ½ cup

- Dried apricots: 4mg
- Prune juice: 2mg
- Raisins: 1mg
- Prunes: 1mg

### Nuts – 1 ounce

- Cashews: 2mg
- Hazelnuts or filberts: 1mg
- Pistachios: 1mg
- Almonds: 1mg
- Piñones: 1mg
- Walnuts: 1mg
- Pecans: 1mg
- Macadamia: 1mg

### Seeds – 1 ounce

- Sesame seeds: 4mg
- Chia seeds: 2mg
- Tahini (sesame paste): 2mg
- Sunflower seeds: 1mg
- Pumpkin seeds: 1mg

### Other Foods

- Breakfast Essentials® added to milk, 1 cup: 5mg
- Ovaltine® added to milk, 1 cup: 3mg
- 1 large egg: 1mg
- Black olives, ¼ cup: 1mg
- Black strap molasses, 1 tablespoon: 1mg



Look for breakfast cereals that are fortified with iron.