



Iron content of foods

How much iron do we need?

Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) for Iron:

Age	Male	Female	Pregnancy	Lactation
0 - 6 months	0.27 mg*	0.27 mg*		
7-12 months	11 mg	11 mg		
1-3 years	7 mg	7 mg		
4-8 years	10 mg	10 mg		
9-13 years	8 mg	8 mg		
14-18 years	11 mg	15 mg		
19-50 years	8 mg	18 mg	27 mg	9 mg

* Adequate Intake (AI)

Heme iron, or iron from meat products is the easiest for the body to absorb and use. Bioavailability of iron is approximately 14-18% from diets with iron from sources of meat, seafood and with sources of vitamin C. Vitamin C (ascorbic acid, or ascorbate) increases absorption of vegetarian sources of iron. Bioavailability of iron is only 5-12 percent from vegetarian diets. The RDA listed above is based on mixed sources, *including* heme-iron sources. The RDA should be increased for patients who are solely vegetarian. Phytates (present in grains and beans) actually inhibit absorption of iron, which is the reason that vegetarians tend to iron deficiency.

Breast milk contains highly bioavailable iron. However, the total amounts of iron in breastmilk are not sufficient to meet the iron needs of infants greater than 6 months of age. For this reason it is very important for infants greater than 6 months to consume solid foods containing iron. Iron-fortified foods are not necessary (e.g., rice cereal fortified with iron), which notoriously cause constipation. Instead foods with natural sources of iron are preferred, including meats, beans, and dark greens. Infants who were born premature are at particular risk for iron deficiency, as they do not have sufficient iron stores at birth.

Iron supplementation should be done under the supervision of a healthcare provider. Iron overload from iron-containing supplements is a leading cause of accidental poisoning in children. Multivitamins and supplements containing iron should be in childproof containers. Iron supplementation in the form of iron bisglycinate has less gastrointestinal side-effects than ferrous sulfate.



Food	Milligrams per serving	% Daily Value
Oysters, eastern, cooked with moist heat, 3 ounces	8	44
White beans, canned, 1 cup	8	44
Chocolate, dark, 45%-69% cacao solids, 3 ounces	7	39
Beef liver, pan fried, 3 ounces	5	28
Lentils, boiled and drained, ½ cup	3	17
Spinach, boiled and drained, ½ cup	3	17
Tofu, firm, ½ cup	3	17
Kidney beans, canned, ½ cup	2	11
Sardines, Atlantic, canned in oil, drained solids with bone, 3 ounces	2	11
Chickpeas, boiled and drained, ½ cup	2	11
Tomatoes, canned, stewed, ½ cup	2	11
Beef, braised bottom round, trimmed to 1/8" fat, 3 ounces	2	11
Potato, baked, flesh and skin, 1 medium potato	2	11
Cashew nuts, oil roasted, 1 ounce (18 nuts)	2	11
Green peas, boiled, ½ cup	1	6
Chicken, roasted, meat and skin, 3 ounces	1	6
Rice, white, long grain, enriched, parboiled, drained, ½ cup	1	6
Bread, whole wheat, 1 slice	1	6
Bread, white, 1 slice	1	6
Raisins, seedless, ¼ cup	1	6
Spaghetti, whole wheat, cooked, 1 cup	1	6
Tuna, light, canned in water, 3 ounces	1	6
Turkey, roasted, breast meat and skin, 3 ounces	1	6
Nuts, pistachio, dry roasted, 1 ounce (49 nuts)	1	6
Broccoli, boiled and drained, ½ cup	1	6

