



Helping families eat well and be active

Why is Iron Important for Children?

Iron is a mineral that is essential to a child's growth and development. Iron helps red blood cells carry oxygen and plays a key role in how the brain and muscles work.

How much iron do kids need?

Children require different amounts of iron at various ages and stages of growth.

Age	Amount per day
Infants	<p>Breastfeeding If you breastfeed, your baby should get enough iron until four to six months of age. Around four to six months of age, your baby's doctor may want you to start feeding your baby cereal also.</p> <p>Formula If you feed your baby with formula, use one that is iron-fortified or one that has enough iron in it. Your baby's doctor will let you know if your baby needs more iron.</p>
Infants 7–12 months	11 milligrams
Toddlers 1–3 years	7 milligrams
Kids 4–8 years	10 milligrams
Kids 9–13 years	8 milligrams
Adolescent boys/girls 14–18 years	11/15 milligrams

Remember that young athletes involved in intense physical movement may require extra iron in their eating plans.

How vitamins can affect iron in your body

Drinking or eating too much calcium can make it hard for the body to absorb iron. If your child drinks a lot of milk and doesn't have a balanced eating plan with iron-rich foods, they may not be getting enough iron.

Combining plant-based sources of iron with foods high in vitamin C will help your child get more iron. Talk to your doctor about variety in your child's eating plan if you are concerned.

Foods high in vitamin C

- Fruits: Oranges, grapefruit, kiwi, melons and strawberries
- Vegetables: Tomatoes, peppers, leafy greens, broccoli and sweet potatoes

Sources of iron

You can get iron from a variety of animal and plant sources. Choosing iron-rich foods can cut down the concern for iron deficiency anemia or not having enough iron in your blood.

Iron supplements are not very tasty. If you don't want to give your child a supplement, find some high-iron foods your child enjoys. Make these foods a regular part of your child's eating plan. Visit this website for a list of high-iron foods:

[cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/vitamins-minerals/iron](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/vitamins-minerals/iron)

Did you know that pumpkin seeds are loaded with iron? So are most beans. Cream of wheat, spinach, dried apricots and lentils can be high-iron parts of your child's eating plan.

If your child is a picky eater, look for recipes where these foods can be hidden in the recipe, such as adding blended lentils or beans into soup or sauces.

Here are some quick and easy meals and snacks that are higher in iron:

- Add chopped spinach to pasta sauce for spaghetti or lasagna
- Spread hummus on a turkey or veggie sandwich
- Sprinkle pumpkin seeds and dried strawberries into cereal, yogurt or trail mix

Animal sources of iron	Iron (milligrams)
Lean sirloin, broiled (3 ounces)	2.9
Lean ground beef, broiled (3 ounces)	1.8
Skinless chicken breast: dark meat, white meat (3 ounces)	1.1, 0.9
Pork, lean, roasted (3 ounces)	0.9
Shrimp (2.5 ounces)	2.0
Tuna (2.5 ounces)	1.2
Clams (2.5 ounces)	2.0

Plant sources of iron	Iron (milligrams)
Fortified breakfast cereal (1 cup)	4.5–18
Pumpkin seeds (1 ounce)	4.2
Soybean nuts (1/2 cup)	3.5
Bran (1/2 cup)	3.0
Spinach, boiled (1/2 cup)	3.2
Red kidney beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	2.6
Prune juice (3/4 cup)	2.3
Lima beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	2.2
Tofu, firm (1/2 cup)	2.0
Enriched rice, cooked (1/2 cup)	1.4
Pretzels (1 ounce)	1.2
Whole-wheat bread (1 slice)	0.9
Green beans, cooked (1/2 cup)	0.8
Egg yolk, large (1)	0.6
Peanut butter, chunky (2 tablespoons)	0.6
Apricots, dried (3)	0.6

Sources:

- USDA National Food Database
- American's Dietetic Association's Complete Food & Nutrition Guide, 2nd Edition