

## Iron - Getting the Important Balance Right

Iron is a mineral that is essential to human life. Its primary role in your body is for oxygen transportation in the red cells of the blood. Iron is also required for oxygen storage in your muscles, for maintaining a healthy immune system, supporting the body's processes of detoxification & metabolism, and the production of hormones, brain chemicals & antioxidants.



Iron deficiency is the most common deficiency in the world and while estimates vary, up to 2 Billion of world's human population are thought to be iron deficient. Research indicates that the significance of iron deficiency and the range of at-risk groups in Australia to be similar to most developed countries.

### **How do I get iron in my diet?**

Your body obtains iron in one of two forms - either Haeme or Non-haeme. Haeme iron is the most readily digestible and is found in red meat, liver, poultry, fish, shellfish, oysters and clams. Non-haeme iron is harder for the body obtain and is found in nuts, legumes, fruit, vegetables, grains and tofu. Dairy foods also contain iron, but are considered a relatively poor source. There are also iron fortified foods in the form of wholegrain & enriched bread, pasta, cereals, milk, fruit juices, egg yolks, dried fruit and dark molasses. See Table 1 for some example dietary sources of iron.

It should be noted that there are nutrients in our diets or taken as supplements that can decrease iron absorption. These include tea, spinach, chocolate and berries, and calcium containing products. Medicines such as antibiotics (tetracycline based) and stomach antacids can also reduce iron absorption. Conversely, vitamin C helps your body to absorb more iron.

The Australian recommended dietary intake for iron is shown in Table 2.

### **How do I know if I am iron deficient?**

Common signs and symptoms of iron deficiency are tiredness and lethargy, increased rate of infection, impaired work performance, cold extremities and poor pallor.

Those most at risk of iron deficiency are as following:

- Vegetarians & vegans - mainly due to the consumption of poorly absorbed iron.
- Children - especially pre-school aged children.
- Adolescent girls - it has been estimated that about 8% of Australian teenage girls have low iron stores.

Table 1 - Dietary sources of Iron:

Source (serving size)	Iron content (mg/serve)
Clams 100g	27.96
Lamb kidneys 130g	15.60
Lamb liver 130g	13.00
Chicken livers 130g	11.70
Mussels 12=120g	8.06
Oysters 12=120g	6.94
Soya bean 100g	5.14
Lamb sirloin chop 100g	2.34
Lean beef sirloin, roasted 100g	1.7
Dried figs 4=80g	1.62
Mung beans 100g	1.17 - 1.4
Dried peach 25g	1.01

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- Women - especially those who are pregnant or who participate in regular strenuous exercise. There is also an increasing rate of iron deficiency with the number of child births.
- Those suffering from other diseases especially those related to heavy or long term blood loss.

#### Supplements:

Iron specific supplements are useful if you have been confirmed as being iron deficient by your healthcare practitioner. Iron is typically included in multivitamins. The absorption of iron from supplements can be improved with the inclusion of [vitamin C](#). To read more refer to our New Leaf Online range of [iron](#) and iron containing [multivitamin](#) products.

**Table 2** - Australian Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) of Iron:

Age (years)	Male (mg/day)	Female (mg/day)
1 - 3	9	9
4 - 8	10	10
9 - 13	8	8
14 - 18	11	15
19 - 50	8	18
51+	8	8
Pregnant women 27mg/day Lactating women - under 18 years 10mg/day - over 18 years 9mg/day		

#### CAUTION - too much iron can be dangerous:

While it is difficult for many people to get enough iron in their diet, it is important that supplements are taken as directed as too much iron (> 45mg/day for an adult) can be dangerous and lead to fatal consequences. Individuals diagnosed with a condition associated with excessive iron, should not take supplements containing iron.

To check your Iron status, New Leaf Online strongly recommends that you consult with your healthcare practitioner.

#### References

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Note: New Leaf does not endorse any form of treatment, nor does it encourage you to undertake any such treatment on your own. We urge you to see your family practitioner before undertaking any kind of medical treatment. Supplements are to be taken with an appropriate diet, exercise program and advice from a qualified practitioner.