



IRON RICH FOODS

Spinach may not give you superhuman strength to fight off villains like Popeye's nemesis Bluto, but this leafy green foods containing iron can help you fight a different type of enemy – iron-deficiency anemia.

Iron-deficiency anemia, the most common form of anemia, is a decrease in the number of red blood cells caused by iron. Without sufficient iron, your body can't produce enough hemoglobin, a substance in red blood cells that make for them to carry oxygen to the body's tissues. As a result, you may feel weak, tired, and irritable.

About 20% of women, 50% of pregnant women, and 3% of men do not have enough iron in their body. The solution, in many cases, is to consume more foods high in iron.

How Your Body Uses Iron In Food

When you eat food with iron, iron is absorbed into your body mainly through the upper part of your small intestine.

There are two forms of dietary iron: heme and nonheme. Heme iron is derived from hemoglobin. It is found in animal foods that originally contained hemoglobin, such as red meats, fish, and poultry. **Your body absorbs the most iron from heme sources.**

High-in Iron Food Sources

Very good sources of heme iron, with 3.5 milligrams or more per serving, include:

- 3 ounces of beef or chicken liver
- 3 ounces of clams or mollusks
- 3 ounces of oysters

Good sources of heme iron, with 2.1 milligrams or more per serving, include:

- 3 ounces of cooked beef
- 3 ounces of canned sardines, canned in oil
- 3 ounces of cooked turkey

Other sources of heme iron, with 0.7 milligrams or more per serving, include:

- 3 ounces of chicken
- 3 ounces of halibut, haddock, perch, salmon, or tuna
- 3 ounces of ham
- 3 ounces of veal

Iron in plant foods such as lentils and spinach is nonheme iron. This is the form of iron added to iron-enriched and iron fortified foods. Our bodies are less efficient at absorbing nonheme iron, but most dietary iron is nonheme iron.

Very good sources of nonheme iron, with 3.5 milligrams or more per serving, include:

- Breakfast cereals enriched with iron
- One cup of cooked beans
- One-half cup of tofu
- 1 ounce of pumpkin, sesame, or squash seeds

Good sources of nonheme iron, with 2.1 milligrams or more per serving include:

- One-half cup of canned lima beans, red kidney beans, chickpeas, or split peas
- One cup of dried apricots
- One medium baked potato
- One medium stalk of broccoli
- One cup of cooked enriched egg noodles
- One-fourth cup of wheat germ

Other sources of nonheme iron, with 0.7 milligrams or more, include:

- 1 ounce of peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pistachios, roasted almonds, roasted cashews, or sunflower seeds
- One-half cup of dried seedless raisins, peaches, or prunes
- One cup of spinach
- One medium green pepper
- One cup of pasta
- One slice of bread, pumpernickel bagel, or bran muffin
- One cup of rice

How to Get More Iron From Your Food

Some foods can help your body absorb iron from iron-rich foods; others can hinder it. To absorb the most iron from what you eat, avoid drinking coffee or tea or consuming calcium-rich foods or drinks with meals containing iron-rich food. To improve your absorption of nonheme iron, eat it along with a good source of Vitamin C – such as orange juice, strawberries – or a food from the meat, fish, and poultry group.

If you have trouble getting iron from food sources, you may need an iron supplement. Speak to your PCP for the proper dosage first and follow instructions carefully. Because very little iron is excreted from the body, iron can build up in body tissues and organs when the normal storage sites – the liver, spleen and bone marrow – are full. Although toxicity from food sources is rare, deadly overdoses are possible when large doses of supplements are ingested all at once.