

Iron Fact Sheet

IRON is an essential mineral the body needs to stay healthy. Most iron is found in the blood in haemoglobin, which carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Iron also supports growth, brain development, and helps the body fight infections.

Iron is absorbed in the small intestine. In coeliac disease, damage to the gut can reduce how well iron is absorbed, leading to low levels. This may cause tiredness, weakness, poor focus, and lower immunity.

Iron needs increase during growth spurts like teenage years, and in pregnancy to support the growing baby. Babies are born with some iron stores, but by about 6 months they need iron from food. Premature babies may need iron even earlier.

Young children, especially between 6 and 12 months, are at higher risk of iron deficiency due to rapid growth and low intake of iron-rich foods like meat. Risk is higher with delayed solids, low meat or high cow's milk intake, or conditions like coeliac disease that affect absorption.

In Australia the recommended daily dietary intakes of iron are:

Approximate Age	Mg per day	Approximate Age	Mg per day
Babies breastfed	0.2	Girls 14-18 years	15
7-12 months olds	11	Men 19 + years	8
1-3 years	9	Women 19-50	18
4-8 years	10	Women 51+ yrs	8
9-13 years	8	During pregnancy	27
Boys 14-18 years	11	During breast feeding	9-10

mg = milligram (one thousandth of a gram)

Usual Sources

Iron in food comes in two main forms: haem iron and non-haem iron.

Haem iron is found in animal foods and is the easiest type for the body to absorb. The best sources are meat and other flesh foods, especially red meat. Chicken and fish also provide useful amounts.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

1300 458 836 • Info@coeliac.org.au • coeliac.org.au

Coeliac Australia is not a medical organisation. Persons reading this material should not act solely on it. The advice of a medical practitioner should always be obtained.



Non-haem iron is found in plant foods and supplements, but the body absorbs only about 2–20% of this form of iron. Even if these foods contain iron, not all of it is taken up by the body. Sources include eggs, legumes such as chickpeas and lentils, nuts, dried fruits like apricots and raisins, and green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli and Brussels Sprouts.

In Australia, wheat breads and many breakfast cereals are fortified with iron, helping people meet their daily needs. However, most gluten-free breads and cereals do not have this fortification. This means people with coeliac disease may need to rely more on natural food sources or supplements to meet their iron requirements.

Approximate quantities of Iron in foods

Food Per Average Serve Size	Average iron(mg)	Food Per Average Serve Size	Average iron (mg)
Haem Sources			
Chicken liver, 50g	4.9	Lamb, cooked, 100g	2-2.5
Beef liver 65g (cooked)	4.23	Prawns, cooked 100g	1.5-2
Shrimp paste (1 Tbsp =16g)	3.28	Canned tuna, 100g	1.16
6 average oysters (wt: 84g)	2.9	Chicken, cooked, 100g	0.8-1.3
Sardines, canned, 100g	2.9	Pork, cooked, 100g	0.7-1.1
Beef, cooked, 100g	2.5-3.5	Salmon, cooked, 100g	0.6
Liver pate (2Tbsp)	2.4	White fish, 100g	0.3-0.7

What hinders iron uptake?

The absorption of iron, especially non-haem iron, is decreased by certain substances found naturally in foods. These include tannins (in tea), calcium, polyphenols (in berries, apples, legumes & grains), and phytates (found in legumes and whole grains). Soybeans contain a protein that may also inhibit absorption.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

1300 458 836 • Info@coeliac.org.au • coeliac.org.au

Coeliac Australia is not a medical organisation. Persons reading this material should not act solely on it. The advice of a medical practitioner should always be obtained.



Approximate quantities of Iron in foods

Food Per Average Serve Size	Average iron(mg)	Food Per Average Serve Size	Average iron (mg)
Non-Haem sources			
Lentils, cooked, 1 cup	3.3	Dried apricots, 30g	0.89
Baked beans, 1 cup	2.44	Raisins dried, 40g	0.7
Eggs (2 large, 120g)	1.93	125ml prune juice	0.62
Fortified GF weetbix 30g	1.9	Smooth peanut butter, 30g	0.52
Soy beans, 1 cup	1.52	Blackstrap molasses (1 tbsp, 20ml)	0.02 - ~1.5
Cashews, 30g	1.5	Potato ½ medium, cooked (75g)	0.23
Spinach (baby, raw), ½ cup	1.28	Cheddar cheese, 40g	0.05
Pine nuts, 30g	1.23	Milk, full cream, 1 cup	0.05
Almonds, 30g	1.1	Fruit, fresh, 1 medium	0.2-0.7

What helps iron uptake?

Iron is better absorbed when it is eaten with a Vitamin C containing food. In the evening meal this can be vegetables such as tomato, capsicum, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, parsley, celery, spinach, cauliflower, fruits (strawberry, grapefruit, kiwi, orange, lemon, lime, papaya) or juices.

Supplements can be taken. High doses should not be taken for longer than 3-6 months without having your doctor check your iron levels. Some medical conditions should not have iron supplements, so check with your doctor. Iron toxicity can occur with high doses.

References:

Nutrient Reference values for Australia and New Zealand. [Iron | Eat For Health](#)
 Australian Food Composition Database - Release 3.0
<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/iron.asp>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

1300 458 836 • Info@coeliac.org.au • coeliac.org.au

Coeliac Australia is not a medical organisation. Persons reading this material should not act solely on it. The advice of a medical practitioner should always be obtained.

