

# Iron Deficiency in Children



## WHY IS IRON IMPORTANT?

Iron is needed to produce healthy red blood cells. This is important for muscle development during growth and to transport oxygen in healthy blood. Iron also plays an important role in maintaining a healthy immune system.

If there is not enough iron in the diet it can lead to iron deficiency anaemia.

### Symptoms of iron deficiency

- ❖ Delayed development
- ❖ Tiredness/lack of energy
- ❖ Pale skin
- ❖ Increased risk of infection
- ❖ Irritability
- ❖ Poor appetite
- ❖ Poor growth

### What causes iron deficiency?

Iron is found in many foods. Good sources are red meat, fish and leafy green vegetables. If there is not enough of these foods in the diet then deficiency can result. Sometimes you can eat enough Iron but it is not absorbed properly. For example, drinking lots of milk can prevent iron from being absorbed in the body. Heavy periods and other medical conditions can cause Iron to be lost from the body which can also cause deficiency.

### How do we increase iron in the diet?

Aim for a healthy, balanced diet which includes a variety of foods containing iron.

The table below shows sources of iron:

FOOD GROUP	GOOD SOURCES OF IRON
Meat, fish and alternatives	All meats e.g. beef, mince, lamb, pork, sausage, chicken, duck. Oily fish e.g. salmon, mackerel, tuna. Egg yolk. Baked beans. Lentils /dhal, kidney beans, chick peas
Protein alternatives	Baked Beans, Lentils/dhal, kidney beans and chickpeas in their own box. Food group title: Protein alternatives.
Fruit and vegetables	Dried fruits e.g. raisins, currants, sultanas, apricots and prunes.  Green leafy vegetables – broccoli, cabbage, spinach, kale. Peas
Bread, cereals and potatoes	Fortified breakfast cereal, e.g. weetabix, cornflakes. Wholemeal bread, wholemeal flour, oatmeal.
Fatty/ sugary foods	Nuts and nut butters*, seeds.
*nuts may be given as butters or ground in cooking from 6months. Due to the risk of choking, whole nuts should not be given to children under 5 years.	
Chocolate and liquorice are also noted as good sources of iron but should not be given regularly. They should only be given as part of a well balanced diet	

## OTHER HELPFUL HINTS TO PREVENTING IRON DEFICIENCY

Young children should avoid drinking tea, as it contains 'tannins' which reduce the absorption of iron.

Vitamin C improves the absorption of iron so it is best to include a source of vitamin C at each meal e.g. a small glass of pure fruit juice or some fruit or potatoes. This is especially important for children who do not eat meat.

After the age of 1 year, children require no more than 1 pint of milk per day to provide adequate calcium and energy. As cows milk is a poor source of iron, consuming large quantities can contribute to iron deficiency.

"Follow on milk" or "Growing up milk" is not required for children who follow a healthy balanced diet.

## VEGETARIAN/VEGAN DIETS

If you or your child follow a vegetarian diet, it is important to ensure you have a wide variety of food in your diet and include as many non meat sources of iron as possible. If you want to use a meat alternative, Tofu is a good source of iron

Following a Vegan diet which excludes all animal based foods, requires planning and may lead to nutritional deficiencies particularly in young children. Supplements of Vitamin B12 and Calcium are usually needed.

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