

# SportsNutrition

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## HOW TO BOOST YOUR IRON INTAKE

Iron is an important part of red blood cells. It helps transport oxygen to your muscles. If you have an iron-poor diet, you can develop iron deficiency anemia and will feel unusually fatigued during exercise.

If you are an avid athlete who participates in running sports, you should pay keen attention to your iron intake. Runners, as compared to other athletes, are prone to becoming anemic. They often experience small iron losses via blood in the intestinal tract. The pounding on their feet can also damage blood cells and require iron for replacement. Routinely monitor hemoglobin, hematocrit, and ferritin (iron stores).

- The recommended iron intake is 8 milligrams (mg) for men, 18 mg for women. Women require more iron because they lose it through menstrual bleeding. Many women consume less than the recommended intake and are at high risk for becoming anemic.

- Red meat is among the best dietary sources of iron. People who do not eat red meat have a higher risk of becoming anemic compared to meat-eaters. We absorb the iron in meat (and other animal proteins) twice as efficiently as the iron in plants. For example, spinach is a relatively iron-rich plant, but only 3% of its iron is absorbable.

- Eating animal protein enhances the absorption of iron in plants when the two types of food are eaten together. Hence, if you were to eat spinach along with some chicken, meat, or fish, the animal protein would help you to better absorb the iron in the spinach. Similarly, adding lean hamburger to chili enhances absorption of the iron in beans.

- Vitamin C enhances iron absorption. Plan to eat vitamin C-rich foods along with meals, such as strawberries on cereal, tomato on a sandwich, vegetables with dinner. Some fruits rich in vitamin C include oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe, kiwi, and strawberries. Some C-rich vegetables include broccoli, spinach, peppers, tomato, and potato.

- In general, “all natural” whole grains offer very little iron and their iron is poorly absorbed. Bread, cereal, and other grain foods are good sources of iron only if the words *enriched* or *fortified* are on the food label. You can significantly boost absorption of iron-enriched grains by including a source of vitamin C with the meal. For example, enjoying orange juice with breakfast cereal boosts iron absorption 2.5 times.

- If available, cook with cast iron skillets and pots. Cast iron offers more nutritional value than does stainless steel cookware! The iron in tomato sauce increases from 3 to 88 mg per half-cup of sauce when the sauce simmers in an iron pot for three hours.

- Milk and dairy products are poor sources of iron. Hence, if you rely primarily on cheese, yogurt, milk, and other dairy foods for protein, you should include iron-rich foods in the rest of your diet.

- You might want to take a simple iron supplement such as a multi-vitamin and mineral pill if you do not eat lean red meats, iron-enriched breakfast cereal or grains, and do not use cast iron cookware. Although the iron in meats is absorbed better than that in a pill, supplementing your diet may protect you from becoming anemic.

<b>Animal sources (best absorbed)</b>	<b>Iron (mg)</b>
Beef, 4 ounces roasted	3
Turkey, 4 ounces roasted dark meat	2
Tuna, 5-ounce can, light	2
Pork, 4 ounces roasted	1
Chicken breast, 4 ounces roasted	1
Fish, 4 ounces haddock, broiled	1
Egg, 1 large	1
<b>Fruit and juice</b>	
Prune juice, 8 ounces	3
Apricots, 8 halves dried	1
Raisins, 1/3 cup	1
<b>Vegetables</b>	
Spinach, 1/2 cup cooked	3
Green Peas, 1/2 cup cooked	1
Broccoli, 1/2 cup cooked	1

<b>Beans and Legumes</b>	<b>Iron (mg)</b>
Kidney beans, 1 cup canned	3
Baked beans, 1 cup	3
Bean curd (tofu), 1/4 cake	2
<b>Grains</b>	
Cereal, Total 100% fortified, 1 cup	18
Wheaties, 3/4 cup	8
Cheerios, 1 cup	8
Oatmeal, 1 packet instant	8
Kellogg's Raisin Bran, 1 cup	5
Kashi GoLean, 1 cup	2
Spaghetti, 1 cup cooked, enriched	2
Bread, 1 slice enriched	1
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	
Brewer's yeast, 1 ounce	5
Molasses, 1 tablespoon blackstrap	3