

Name _____ Date _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Boosting Iron Intake

All athletes need to get enough iron in their diets to perform their best. Endurance athletes (such as long-distance runners and cyclists), female athletes, and vegetarian athletes are at greater risk for iron depletion and deficiency. Iron deficiency can cause fatigue and decrease performance.

It is easier to prevent iron deficiency than to treat it. To increase iron in your diet:

1. Eat more iron-rich foods and iron-enhancers (foods that help your body absorb iron).
2. Avoid foods and beverages that decrease iron absorption.

How Much Iron Do You Need?

Male and female athletes have different requirements for iron.

- Men and boys:
 - 14- to 18-year-olds: 11 milligrams of iron each day.
 - Younger than 14 years and older than 18 years: 8 milligrams of iron each day.
- Women and girls:
 - 9- to 13-year-olds: 8 milligrams of iron each day.
 - 14- to 18-year-olds: 15 milligrams of iron each day.
 - 19- to 30-year-olds: 18 milligrams of iron each day.

Good Food Sources of Iron

Iron is found in two forms: **heme** (found in meat) and **non-heme** (found in plants and other foods). Heme iron is better absorbed by the body than non-heme iron (15%-35% versus 2%-20%).

The charts list some good food sources of iron.

Sources of Heme Iron

Food and Serving Size	Amount of Iron
3 ounces beef (lean steak, roast beef, ground beef)	3.0 milligrams
1 cup tuna fish	2.4 milligrams
3 ounces dark-meat chicken or turkey	1.3 milligrams
3 ounces halibut	0.9 milligrams
3 ounces pork loin	0.8 milligrams

Sources of Non-Heme Iron

Food and Serving Size	Amount of Iron
1 cup cereal (amount depends on brand, so read the Nutrition Facts panel to see how much iron is in your favorite cereal)	2-16 milligrams
1 cup instant oatmeal (if iron is added; read the label)	10 milligrams
1 cup lentils	6.5 milligrams
1 cup cooked fresh spinach	6.4 milligrams
1 cup black beans	4.5 milligrams
1 cup kidney beans	3.0 milligrams
½ cup raisins	1.6 milligrams
Black bean vegetable burger	1.5 milligrams

Tips to Help Your Body Absorb Iron

Your body does not absorb iron from plants as easily as iron from meat. Follow these tips to boost the amount of iron you absorb from plant foods.

- Include a glass of orange juice or a vitamin C–rich fruit or vegetable (orange, grapefruit, strawberries, tomato juice, or V-8 juice) when you eat cereal.
- Add salsa, tomatoes, or red or green peppers to bean burritos to help absorb the iron in the beans.
- Include a small amount of meat with iron-rich vegetables and grains (stir-fry with small amounts of lean beef, brown rice, or enriched white rice and vegetables).
- Add fermented foods, such as sauerkraut and miso, to other iron-rich foods.
- Cook foods in a cast iron skillet.

Food and Beverages That Decrease Iron Absorption

- Avoid coffee or tea with meals. The compounds in coffee and tea block iron absorption. Enjoy coffee or tea between meals.
- Avoid high-fiber bran cereals while treating iron deficiency. Bran cereals are high in compounds called phytates, which decrease iron absorption.

What Should You Know About Iron Supplements?

- Never take iron supplements without knowing your iron levels and without a recommendation from a health care provider. Getting too much iron could have negative health consequences.
- Take an iron supplement **as directed** by your health care provider. It can cause an upset stomach if taken incorrectly.

- Drink plenty of water if you are taking iron supplements because they are constipating.
- Taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement (with iron) is a good preventive strategy for athletes at risk of iron depletion and deficiency. Look for a supplement with 18 to 27 milligrams of iron.

Notes: