

# Increase Your Iron Intake



## Why This Diet Is Important

These guidelines are designed to help you choose foods that are both high in iron and that will help your body use iron. Iron is a mineral that you need to carry oxygen through the body. Without enough iron you can become very tired, pale-looking and irritable. Young children, pregnant and pre-menopausal women, some athletes, vegetarians and many older adults who may not be getting enough iron in their diet will find these guidelines helpful.

## Heme and Non-Heme Iron

Food contains iron in two forms: "heme" and "non-heme". Heme iron is better used by your body than non-heme iron. Heme iron is found in meat, fish and poultry. Non-heme iron is found in dried beans (such as kidney beans), enriched and whole grains, nuts and some fruits and vegetables. Non-heme iron can be better used by your body when you eat foods that contain heme iron at the same time. It is important to eat or drink foods rich in vitamin C such as citrus fruits and juices, cantaloupe, strawberries, broccoli, peppers and tomatoes. These foods will also help your body use non-heme iron.

## Steps You Can Take

- Include at least one iron-rich food and one food rich in vitamin C at each meal.
- Add cooked dried beans or lentils to soups, stews or casseroles.

- Choose breakfast cereals and flour that are fortified/enriched with iron. Read the Nutrition Facts box on packaged foods and choose those foods that are high in iron.
- Choose dark green and orange vegetables and fruits more often. For example, choose spinach instead of lettuce for your salad.
- Have spaghetti with tomato meat sauce rather than cream sauce.
- Choose dried fruit as a snack more often.
- Add raisins or other dried fruit to cereal or in your favourite cookie/muffin recipe.
- Have a glass of orange juice with your cereal at breakfast.
- Coffee or tea with meals may decrease iron absorption so have these beverages after meals.

## Reading Food Labels for Iron

You will find the Nutrition Facts box on most packaged food products. Look for the Percent Daily Value (%DV) that tells you whether a food has a little or a lot of a given nutrient. Packaged foods may also have labeling claims which can help you make better choices if you know what the claim means. For answers to frequently asked questions about labelling claims and how to use %DV, visit the [EatRight Ontario website](http://www.eatrightontario.ca).

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