Coach Leanne Fernandes
WOMEN'S HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH

Personal Trainer
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IRON FACT SHEET

Iron-rich foods guide

Heme iron comes from animal foods and is generally absorbed more easily, while non-heme iron comes from plant and fortified foods.
Iron helps make red blood cells and supports energy, oxygen delivery, and exercise performance.

Why iron matters

Iron supports red blood cell production, oxygen transport, energy levels, and exercise capacity. Low iron intake can contribute to fatigue and reduced performance, especially in people with higher needs or lower intake from food.

How much iron do I need?

For most adults, the target is **8 mg/day for men and postmenopausal women**, and **18 mg/day for premenopausal women**. During pregnancy, the need rises to **27 mg/day**, while lactating women generally need about **9 mg/day**.

Typical daily needs

- **Men 19+**: 8 mg/day.
- **Women 19–49**: 18 mg/day.
- **Women 50+**: 8 mg/day
- **Pregnancy**: 27 mg/day.
- **Lactation**: 9 mg/day.

Children and teens

- **7–12 months**: 11 mg/day.
- **1–3 years**: 7 mg/day.
- **4–8 years**: 10 mg/day.
- **9–13 years**: 8 mg/day.
- **14–18 years**: 11 mg/day for males, 15 mg/day for females.

Women of reproductive age are the group most likely to fall short because of monthly blood loss, so they often need more deliberate food planning around iron-rich meals.

Upper limit

For adults, the tolerable upper intake level is **45 mg/day** from food and supplements combined, unless a clinician has advised otherwise.

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Heme iron foods

These come from animal foods and are generally better absorbed.

Food	Iron per 100 g	Common serve	Iron per serve
Chicken liver	11.0 mg	75 g cooked	8.3 mg
Lamb liver	11.0 mg	75 g cooked	8.3 mg
Beef liver	6.5 mg	75 g cooked	4.9 mg
Oysters, cooked	9.2 mg	100 g	9.2 mg
Clams	7.9 mg	100 g	7.9 mg
Mussels	6.7 mg	100 g	6.7 mg
Sardines	6.1 mg	100 g	6.1 mg
Beef	3.5 mg	100 g cooked	3.5 mg
Kangaroo	3.2 mg	100 g cooked	3.2 mg
Lamb	2.5 mg	100 g cooked	2.5 mg
Eggs	1.98 mg	2 large eggs (100 g)	2.0 mg
Salmon	1.28 mg	100 g cooked	1.28 mg
Tuna, canned	1.07 mg	100 g drained	1.07 mg
Pork	0.8 mg	100 g cooked	0.8 mg
Chicken	0.4 mg	100 g cooked	0.4 mg

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Non-heme iron foods

These foods come from plant and fortified sources and can still make a strong contribution to total iron intake.

Food	Iron per 100 g	Common serve	Iron per serve
Sesame seeds	10.4 mg	1 tbsp (10 g)	1.0 mg
Red lentils, dry	9.1 mg	1 cup cooked (about 200 g)	3.4 mg
Sunflower seeds	6.4 mg	30 g handful	1.9 mg
Cashews	5.0 mg	30 g handful	1.5 mg
Weet-Bix	4.2 mg	2 biscuits (30 g)	1.3 mg
Kidney beans	2.0 mg	1 cup cooked (175 g)	3.5 mg
Tofu	2.96 mg	150 g	4.4 mg
Almonds	3.0 mg	30 g handful	0.9 mg
Spinach, boiled	1.6 mg	1 cup cooked (180 g)	2.9 mg
Chickpeas, canned	1.8 mg	1 cup drained (165 g)	3.0 mg
Dried apricots	3.1 mg	30 g small handful	0.9 mg
All Bran	3.2 mg	1 serving (30 g)	1.0 mg
Spinach, raw	3.0 mg	1 cup raw (30 g)	0.9 mg

Tips to improve absorption

- Choose heme iron foods regularly if iron intake is low, because they are generally better absorbed.
- Pair non-heme iron foods with vitamin C sources such as citrus, kiwi fruit, berries, capsicum, or tomato to improve absorption.
- Tea and coffee consumed around meals can reduce iron absorption.

Easy meal ideas

- Breakfast: Weet-Bix or All Bran with fruit
- Lunch: Lentil salad with capsicum, tomato, and lemon dressing
- Dinner: Beef, lamb, or kangaroo with spinach and vegetables
- Snack: Cashews, sunflower seeds, dried apricots, or boiled eggs

Note

Iron values are approximate and can vary with brand, preparation method, and whether the food is raw, cooked, canned, or drained.

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Vitamin C

Vitamin C helps improve absorption of **non-heme** iron from plant foods, so pairing iron-rich meals with fruit or vegetables from the list below is a simple, practical strategy. This is especially useful for vegetarian or vegan clients, or anyone aiming to improve iron intake from food.

High-vitamin C foods

- Red capsicum
- Green capsicum
- Oranges
- Mandarins
- Grapefruit
- Kiwifruit
- Strawberries
- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Blackberries
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Tomatoes
- Tomato salsa or passata
- Potatoes
- Sweet potato
- Pineapple
- Papaya
- Lemon and lime
- Cauliflower
- Cabbage

Easy pairings with iron foods

- Lentils + tomato or capsicum
- Spinach + strawberries or citrus
- Tofu + broccoli or red capsicum
- Beans + tomato salsa
- Fortified cereal + kiwi or berries
- Beef or kangaroo + broccoli or capsicum on the side

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Iron Absorption Inhibitors

Iron absorption inhibitors are foods or compounds that make it harder for your body to absorb iron, especially **non-heme** iron from plant foods. The main ones are phytates, polyphenols, calcium, and some proteins in soy, dairy, and eggs.

Main inhibitors

- **Phytates**: found in grains, bran, legumes, nuts, and seeds; they bind iron and reduce absorption.
- **Polyphenols / tannins**: found in tea, coffee, and some plant foods; they can significantly reduce non-heme iron uptake when taken with meals.
- **Calcium**: can inhibit both heme and non-heme iron absorption, especially when high-calcium foods or supplements are taken with iron-rich meals.
- **Soy proteins**: can reduce iron absorption from plant-based meals.
- **Milk and eggs**: can also inhibit iron absorption in some meal combinations.

Practical examples

- Tea or coffee with a lentil or cereal meal can reduce iron absorption.
- A calcium supplement taken with an iron-rich meal can interfere with absorption.
- A breakfast of fortified cereal with milk will usually provide less absorbable iron than the cereal eaten with a vitamin C-rich food and water.

Simple tips

- Keep tea and coffee away from iron-rich meals when iron intake is a priority.
- Separate calcium supplements from iron-focused meals where possible.
- Pair plant-based iron foods with vitamin C to help offset some inhibition from phytates.

Important distinction

Heme iron from meat, poultry, and seafood is less affected by these inhibitors than non-heme iron from plants, which is why meat-based meals are usually more iron-efficient.

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