IRON-RICH FOODS

Iron is an essential part of your diet, as it helps to maintain healthy blood. Iron is found in red blood cells called hemoglobin, and helps in delivering oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body. Iron is also contained in muscle cells called myoglobin, and helps with muscle movement. Not getting enough iron in your diet puts you at risk for iron deficiency anemia, which can cause you to feel very tired.

Let's talk about where iron comes from in our diet! There are two types of dietary iron: **heme** and **non-heme** iron. Heme iron comes from animal proteins including meat and fish, whereas non-heme iron comes from plant-based foods like whole grains, beans, dried fruits, nuts, seeds, and dark green leafy vegetables. While heme iron is easier for your body to absorb, it is important to get a variety of non-heme iron foods in your diet as well.

The Recommended Daily Allowance (or RDA) for iron varies based on the type of iron in your diet. According to the NIH, the RDA for people who only eat non-heme iron (e.g. vegetarians and vegans) is 1.8 times higher than those who have meat and seafood sources in their diet.

Age	RDA for HEME	RDA for NON-HEME
7- 12 months	0.27 mg	0.49 mg
1-3 years	11 mg	20 mg
4-8 years	10mg	18 mg
9-13 years	8 mg	14.5 mg
14-18 years	11 mg (Males) 15 mg (Females with menstrual cycles)	20 mg (Males) 27 mg (Females)
19+ years	8 mg (Males) 18 mg (Females)	14.5 mg (Males) 32.5 mg (Females)

Information adopted from the NIH.

There are tricks to increase iron-rich food absorption. There are also foods that decrease iron absorption. Mixing your non-heme foods (e.g. leafy greens) with heme foods (e.g. meat and seafood) is thought to enhance the absorption of your non-heme foods.

 Vitamin C-containing foods (e.g. citrus)	 Grilled salmon (or any heme or non-heme food!)	
 Tomatoes, bell peppers, and broccoli are other sources of Vitamin C!	 Leafy greens!	
 Cooking your regular meals in an iron skillet		
 Dairy products	Foods that are rich in calcium (e.g. milk) have been shown to decrease iron absorption.	

Now here is a list of foods from the NIH breaking down the amount of iron in each source:

Table 2: Selected Food Sources of Iron [25]

Food	Milligrams per serving	Percent DV*
Breakfast cereals, fortified with 100% of the DV for iron, 1 serving	18	100
Oysters, eastern, cooked with moist heat, 3 ounces	8	44
White beans, canned, 1 cup	8	44
Chocolate, dark, 45%–69% cacao solids, 3 ounces	7	39
Beef liver, pan fried, 3 ounces	5	28
Lentils, boiled and drained, ½ cup	3	17
Spinach, boiled and drained, ½ cup	3	17
Tofu, firm, ½ cup	3	17
Kidney beans, canned, ½ cup	2	11
Sardines, Atlantic, canned in oil, drained solids with bone, 3 ounces	2	11
Chickpeas, boiled and drained, ½ cup	2	11
Tomatoes, canned, stewed, ½ cup	2	11
Beef, braised bottom round, trimmed to 1/8” fat, 3 ounces	2	11
Potato, baked, flesh and skin, 1 medium potato	2	11
Cashew nuts, oil roasted, 1 ounce (18 nuts)	2	11
Green peas, boiled, ½ cup	1	6
Chicken, roasted, meat and skin, 3 ounces	1	6
Rice, white, long grain, enriched, parboiled, drained, ½ cup	1	6
Bread, whole wheat, 1 slice	1	6
Bread, white, 1 slice	1	6
Raisins, seedless, ¼ cup	1	6
Spaghetti, whole wheat, cooked, 1 cup	1	6
Tuna, light, canned in water, 3 ounces	1	6
Turkey, roasted, breast meat and skin, 3 ounces	1	6
Nuts, pistachio, dry roasted, 1 ounce (49 nuts)	1	6
Broccoli, boiled and drained, ½ cup	1	6
Egg, hard boiled, 1 large	1	6
Rice, brown, long or medium grain, cooked, 1 cup	1	6
Cheese, cheddar, 1.5 ounces	0	0
Cantaloupe, diced, ½ cup	0	0
Mushrooms, white, sliced and stir-fried, ½ cup	0	0
Cheese, cottage, 2% milk fat, ½ cup	0	0
Milk, 1 cup	0	0

* DV = Daily Value. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) developed DVs to help consumers compare the nutrient contents of products within the context of a total diet. The DV for iron is 18 mg for adults and children age 4 years and older [26,27]. FDA requires food labels to list iron content. Foods providing 20% or more of the DV are considered to be high sources of a nutrient, but foods providing lower percentages of the DV also contribute to a healthful diet.