

TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR

IRON INTAKE



Do you ever?

- Feel tired or lethargic
- Seem irritable or grumpy
- Suffer frequent infections
- Feel the cold
- Tire easily when exercising
- Have difficulty concentrating

It may surprise you these common symptoms are often caused by iron deficiency; easily avoided by eating more iron-rich foods.

Thousands of New Zealanders aren't getting enough iron – are you one of them?

Follow these simple steps to make sure you're getting enough.

1. SEE RED

Iron is found in a number of foods, including red meat. In general, the redder the meat, the higher the iron content. But not all iron is the same.

2. EAT LEAN RED MEAT REGULARLY

There are two types of iron in food: haem iron, found in meat and fish, and non-haem iron, found mainly in plant foods, such as cereals, vegetables, beans and fruit. We use haem iron far more easily, with about a quarter being used, whereas only about 5% of non-haem iron is absorbed.

For example, eating just 120g of lean beef steak provides the same amount of iron as a massive 1kg of silverbeet. This provides over a third of a woman's daily iron needs.

3. GET PLENTY OF VITAMIN C

Vitamin C, found in fruit and vegetables, helps the body use non-haem iron. Try to include fruit or vegetables with every meal.

4. EAT RED MEAT AND VEGETABLES TOGETHER

'Meat and three veg' is a traditional Kiwi meal and it's good for you too. Eating meat and vegetables together helps the body use up to four times more of the non-haem iron in the meal. Other examples of iron-rich meal combos include meat and vegetable stir-fry, pasta with vegetables and meat sauce (e.g. spaghetti bolognese) or a lean beef sandwich.

5. KEEP YOUR MEALS TANNIN FREE

The tannin in tea, and to a lesser extent coffee, reduces the amount of iron used from food. Aim to drink tea and coffee between meals rather than with them.

6. BEWARE OF DIETING

Research shows girls and women on low calorie diets often go short on iron. The iron in meat is found in the lean part. Trimming the fat takes away none of the iron, making lean beef and lamb great if you're watching your weight.

7. EXTRA IRON FOR EXERCISE

Extra iron is vital for everyone involved in sports and exercise. A lack of iron can decrease performance through less oxygen being available where it's most needed. If you aren't performing at your best, have your iron levels checked. Have a look at our *Food for Sport* brochure for more information.

8. DON'T RELY ON SUPPLEMENTS

Iron supplements should only be taken under medical supervision. In the long term, food is the safest and healthiest way to maintain iron levels. Frequent use of iron supplements may reduce the absorption of zinc, copper and calcium, increasing the risk of deficiencies.

9. CHOOSE A VARIETY OF FOODS

Eating a variety of foods is the best way to get enough iron. Choose foods from each of the main food groups to ensure you have enough iron each day: breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, dairy foods and red meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans or lentils.

10. BE EXTRA IRON SMART IF YOU'RE AT RISK

There are certain people most at risk of being short of iron:

- Infants, children and teenagers because they are growing rapidly
- Pregnant women due to increased blood levels and building baby's iron stores
- Girls and women who have periods, due to regular monthly blood loss
- Athletes and very active people
- People on restrictive or fad diets

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Other resources: *Thousands of New Zealanders Don't Get Enough Iron, Is Your Baby Getting Enough Iron?, and Iron For Toddlers*

For a free copy of these resources, please contact:
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For more information and great iron-rich recipes and meal ideas, visit recipes.co.nz

Health problems, including iron deficiency, may result from an inadequate diet. They may also have a medical basis unrelated to diet. The information on this sheet is only general and is not to be taken as a substitute for medical advice in relation to specific symptoms or health concerns.

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