

## Why is iron important?

Having low iron or being diagnosed with iron deficiency anemia means you or your child might:

- Feel tired and weak
- Act cranky or irritable
- Look pale
- Not feel like eating
- Get sick more often

In addition, children with low iron don't grow as well, have trouble learning, or they may not do as well in school. If you're a pregnant mom with low iron, your baby could be born too soon or too small.

## What is iron-deficiency anemia?

Iron-deficiency anemia is a condition that develops when your blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells or hemoglobin. Symptoms of anemia, like feeling tired, occur because it's harder for the body to get the oxygen it needs.

Iron-deficiency anemia is the most common type of anemia. Eating foods that are good sources of iron, and when needed, taking an iron supplement, are the best ways to treat iron-deficiency anemia.



Preventing iron-deficiency anemia can help you and your family be healthy and feel good. The tips in this pamphlet are simple and easy to follow. Take a look at the back page for a sample menu and a recipe that's great for breakfast or even dinner.

### Sample Menu A full day of foods with iron for you or your child

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Breakfast</b> | WIC cereal with fruit and milk, orange juice, toast          |
| <b>Snack</b>     | crackers with peanut butter, fruit                           |
| <b>Lunch</b>     | soft tacos with beans and meat, lettuce, tomatoes, milk      |
| <b>Snack</b>     | hummus with vegetables                                       |
| <b>Dinner</b>    | chicken or tofu with rice, broccoli and carrots, fruit, milk |



## Add more iron with this recipe for Eggs Mexicali!

- 2 cups salsa or tomato sauce
  - 15 oz. can of beans (pinto, black, etc.), rinsed and drained, or 2 cups cooked beans
  - 6–8 eggs
  - 1/4 cup cheese, grated
1. Combine salsa and beans in a pan.
  2. Cook over medium heat, stirring until the mixture boils.
  3. Crack each egg and place over the mixture one at a time.
  4. Cover with a lid and cook until the eggs are firm—about 6 minutes.
  5. Sprinkle with grated cheese and heat until cheese melts.
  6. Serve with tortillas and rice. Serves 4–6.



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Pump up  
the iron!

Tips for choosing foods with iron  
to help you and your family  
stay healthy and feel good!

# How can I get enough iron for myself and my family?

## Tips for Babies

### Breastfeed!

- Breastmilk has iron your baby can absorb easily. Around 4 months of age, ask your doctor about iron supplements for your breastfed baby.
- At one year, you may continue to breastfeed, or offer cow's milk.

### Offer iron-fortified baby cereal around 6 months.

- Mix baby cereal with breastmilk or formula.
- Use baby cereal to make your own teething biscuits or cookies.

### Offer foods with iron from 6 to 9 months.

- Offer baby food meats. Mix with other soft foods like mashed vegetables, soft cooked noodles, or rice.
- Cook and mash ground meat, beans, or tofu. Offer an age-appropriate fruit or vegetable containing Vitamin C at the same meal. See "Foods High in Vitamin C" in the right-hand panel.



### Babies...Toddlers...Milk and Iron

Babies usually switch from breastmilk or formula to cow's milk around their first birthday, and you may continue to breastfeed. Milk is a good source of protein and calcium, but not a good source of iron.

It's common during this change for some toddlers to just fill up on milk; which means they may not have room for other foods, especially those foods with iron.

The goal is to help your child be a good eater and enjoy a variety of foods, including milk and foods with iron.

**!** If your baby or child has low iron, their doctor might give you iron drops for them. Be careful to give the right amount of iron drops, and not too much! Keep all iron pills and iron drops away from children. Too much iron from pills or drops can poison your child!



## Tips for Children and Adults

- **Choose 2 or 3 foods that are good sources of iron each day.** This pamphlet has a list of iron containing foods and a sample menu to help you plan your day.
- **When looking for a snack,** choose foods with iron, like WIC cereals mixed with dried fruits.
- **Add a little meat to other foods,** like macaroni and cheese, cheese pizza, and vegetable dishes.
- **Cook foods in cast iron skillets or pans.** Foods cooked in cast iron cookware can be higher in iron. This happens when small amounts of iron from the pan is absorbed into the food.
- **When cooking dried beans,** soak them for several hours in water before you cook them, pour off the water and use new water to cook the beans. Our bodies are better able to absorb the iron in beans when they've soaked for several hours, or overnight.
- **If you drink coffee or tea,** have them between meals because they interfere with your body's iron absorption.
- **If you're pregnant,** prenatal vitamins have the extra iron you need for both you and your baby. If you have trouble taking prenatal vitamins talk to your doctor or ask WIC for ideas. Take prenatal vitamins during your pregnancy. Ask your doctor about continuing once your baby is born.
- **Adults and children with low iron** may need additional iron pills. If you have low iron, discuss this with your doctor.



## Foods High in Iron

### Meats

- Beef
- Pork
- Chicken or turkey
- Fish and clams

### Non-Meats

- WIC cereals
- Cooked dried beans and peas
- Prune juice
- Tofu
- Eggs
- Bread and tortillas
- Rice, pasta, and cooked cereal
- Leafy greens: collards, chard, kale, mustard greens, spinach
- Dried fruit

## Foods High in Vitamin C

### Vegetables

- Potato
- Tomato
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Cabbage
- Bell pepper

### Fruits

- Orange
- Cantaloupe
- Mango
- Papaya
- Grapefruit
- Strawberry

### Juices

- Orange
- Grapefruit
- Tomato
- All WIC juices



## Eat vitamin C foods with iron foods

Vitamin C helps your body use iron. Eat a vitamin C food when you eat iron foods, or cook them together.

Examples:

- Drink a glass of orange juice with your breakfast cereal.
- Cook your beans with some tomatoes.
- Have some salsa on your taco.
- Give your baby some fruit with her cereal.

**Warning:** Children under age 4 can choke on nuts, fruit skins, dried fruit, and raw vegetables. Cook all vegetables for infants and young children. Only offer age-appropriate foods to babies and young children. Ask WIC for suggestions or ideas.