

This TelAbility handout will outline some high-iron containing foods and ways to help these foods become better absorbed by the body.

Iron is a very important mineral in our diet. Not only does it help to carry oxygen to all of the cells in our body, but is especially important for developing brain tissues in the first two years of life. Because children tend to grow quickly (and as a result build lots of cells that need oxygen), they are more at risk for developing iron deficiency (low iron levels). Iron deficiency anemia is one of the most common pediatric nutrition problems, and can affect growth, learning and a child's attention span. Children with special health care needs may be at higher risk for developing iron-deficiency, as their diets may be more limited, and certain medications may interfere with their body's ability to absorb iron. Children's multivitamins fortified with iron are available to help ensure a child receives enough iron during the day, but many iron-containing foods are an essential part of a healthy diet. See some sources of iron in the table below.

How much iron does my child need?

The Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) for iron in children ages six months to ten years is 10 milligrams each day.

What are some sources of iron in the diet?

<u>Food</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Iron (in milligrams)</u>
<u>STARCHES</u>		
Instant Oatmeal	1 packet	6.3 mg
Cream of Wheat	½ cup	5.5 mg
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	.0 mg
White bread	1 slice	.7 mg
Tortilla, corn, enriched	1 (1 oz)	1.42
Noodles/Spaghetti	½ cup	.7 mg
Iron fortified cereals (like raisin bran)	¾ cup	varies (read box label)
Potato(baked with skin)	1 med	2.75 mg
<u>MEATS/FISH/POULTRY</u>		
Hamburger	3 ounces	2.35 mg
Soybeans	½ cup	4.4 mg
Chicken	3 ounces	1.5 mg
Eggs	1	1 mg
Fish	3 ounces	1-1.5 mg

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What are some sources of iron in the diet? (continued)

DAIRY

Whole Milk	8 ounces	0.1 mg
Cheddar Cheese	1 ounce	0.19mg
Yogurt	8 ounces	0.18mg

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Green leafy vegetables	½ cup	2 mg
Raisins	2/3 cup	2.08 mg
Peas, mixed vegetables	½ cup	2 mg
Avocado	1 med	2.04 mg
Prunes (dried or cooked)	1/2 cup	1.18 mg
Prune juice	½ cup	1.51 mg
Rice, white, enriched	½ cup	0.9 mg
Apricots	3 medium	0.58 mg

MISCELLANEOUS

Blackstrap molasses	1Tbsp	3.21 mg
Molasses	1 Tbsp	1 mg

What are some ways to improve iron absorption in the diet?

** The body's ability to absorb iron can vary from 1-20% depending on what combination of foods and fluids is consumed. Eating foods rich in Vitamin C with a meal or snack can significantly boost how much iron is absorbed in a meal. Try citrus fruits, melons, mango, pineapple, berries, tomato products, spinach and potatoes.

** There is a "heme factor" present in meats, poultry and fish that leads to better total iron absorption than in "non-heme", plant-based foods and dairy products.

** Use iron or stainless-steel cookware to help with iron absorption when cooking-acidic products (like tomato sauce).

** Certain foods can *decrease* the amount of iron that is absorbed in a meal. Examples are tannins (from tea), calcium-containing foods, and high fiber foods. Foods in these categories are a very important part of a healthy diet, so consume these kinds of foods in between meals for maximum iron absorption (or eat your high iron foods as snacks).

For more information on this TelAbility handout, contact the author, Sharon Wallace, RD, CSP, CNSD, LDN at sharonwallace@nc.rr.com or speak to your local pediatric nutritionist.

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References

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