

Information for Parents

Children Need Iron

Why is Iron Important?

A lack of iron can result in a condition called Anaemia. Anaemia is caused by a reduction in correctly formed red blood cells. There can be a number of causes but the most common cause world-wide is 'iron-deficiency anaemia'. Young children have an increased need for iron. Symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia are pale appearance, delayed development, loss of appetite, increased risk of infection, poor weight gain, irritability, poor speech, tiredness and lethargy. As many as 12% of children in their second year of life may be short of iron.

Babies are born with a natural supply of iron but by 6 month of age these iron stores will have run down. It is important therefore that iron is provided in the diet.

How can I reduce my child's risk of iron-deficiency anaemia?

Many things affect the amount of iron in our food and how well our bodies absorb it. The following key points will help to ensure your child is getting enough iron:

- Give breast or formula milk as the main drink until your baby is one year old because "doorstep" cow's milk hasn't got added iron or vitamins.
- Include 3 or more foods rich in iron each day.
- Vegetarians should aim to include vegetarian sources three times a day.
- As tea contains 'Tannins' which reduce the absorption of iron young children should not drink tea.
- Vitamin C helps iron to be absorbed from food so aim to include a source of Vitamin C at each meal. This is particularly important for children that don't eat meat.

So what are the best sources of iron in the diet?

Food Group	Good Sources of Iron
Fruit and Vegetables	Dried fruits for example currants, apricots, sultanas, prunes Green leafy vegetables for example spinach, saag
Breads, cereals and potatoes	Fortified breakfast cereals for example Branflakes, Weetabix, cornflakes; wholemeal bread; wholemeal flour; chapatti made with dark grade flour; oatmeal; soya flour
Meat, Fish and Alternatives	Egg yolk, all meats for example beef, corned beef, beefburgers, mince, sausage, lamb, mutton, pork, duck. Oily fish/ seafood for example pilchards, sardines, sprats,

	fish paste, cockles, mussels, whelks Beans and pulses for example dhal, chana, moong, urid, lentils, baked beans
Foods Containing Fat, Foods Containing Sugar	Cocoa powder, chocolate, black treacle, liquorice, nuts and nut butters**, curry powder, ground almonds, seeds

***Nuts may be given as nut butters or ground in cooking from 6 months unless there is a strong family history of allergies. In this case nuts should not be introduced until 3 years of age. Whole nuts should not be given to children under 5 years due to the risk of choking.*

What are the best sources of Vitamin C in our diet?

Type of Food	Good Sources of Vitamin C
Green Vegetables	Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, runner beans, peas, okra
Salad Vegetables	Tomatoes, peppers, watercress, parsley
Citrus Fruits	Oranges, satsumas, grapefruits, lemons and their fruit juices
Other Fruits	Strawberries, raspberries, pineapple, blackberries, gooseberries, mangoes, guavas, papaya, blackcurrants
Miscellaneous	Blackcurrant cordials
Potatoes	Particularly new potatoes, jacket and chipped.

N.B. If fruit and vegetables are stored or cooked for long periods of time some of the Vitamin C within them will be destroyed. Try and buy as fresh as possible, use a minimal amount of water in cooking and do not overcook.

Meal Ideas

Breakfast

Breakfast cereals fortified with iron (check the label)
Glass of Pure Orange Juice

Bacon, Wholemeal toast and spread
Glass of low sugar or sugar free blackcurrant drink (high in Vitamin C)

Sausage and Tomato, Wholemeal toast and spread
Glass of low sugar or sugar free blackcurrant drink (high in Vitamin C)

Egg – boiled, scrambled or poached, wholemeal toast and spread
Glass of Tomato Juice or Grapefruit Juice

Prunes, Wholemeal toast and spread
Glass of Pure Orange Juice

Snack Meal

Peanut butter and tomato sandwiches
Soya pate or soya sandwich spread sandwiches
Lentil pate on toast
Sardines on toast
Fish paste sandwiches
Liver sausage sandwiches

Baked Beans with Jacket Potato
Lentil Soup and a roll
Houmus with Pitta Bread

Serve the above with a glass of fruit juice or offer citrus fruit as a dessert.

Main Meal

Lamb Hot Pot
Savoury Mince and Gravy
Steak and Kidney
Corned Beef Hash
Liver Casserole
Beefburgers
Beef or Lamb Curry
Dahl

All meals are best served with potatoes, rice, spaghetti or other pasta plus a salad or lightly boiled vegetables. This will help to make a balanced meal.

Vegetarian Ideas

Mixed bean casserole with tinned tomatoes
Lentil Loaf, green vegetables and jacket potato
Vegetables and tomato sauce with wholemeal spaghetti
Lentil curry
Soya meat substitute "Shepherds Pie" with lightly cooked Brussels sprouts

Serve the above with a glass of fruit juice or offer citrus fruit as a dessert.

Iron Rich Treats

Dried fruit – sultanas, raisins, dried apricots
Chocolate – only give this as an occasional treat

Always give treats after a meal and remember to clean your child's teeth afterwards.