

# IRON

## for Strong, Healthy Blood

### What is Iron and Why Do You Need It?

Iron is an essential mineral that is needed for healthy blood. You get iron from the foods you eat. It helps your blood carry oxygen throughout your body. If you don't eat enough iron-rich foods, your blood could become low in iron. This is called "iron deficiency anemia" or simply "anemia." Symptoms of anemia include:

- Feeling tired, weak, or grouchy
- Getting sick often
- Trouble learning or working
- Pale skin

### Eat Plenty of Iron-Rich Foods

To make sure you have strong, healthy blood, choose these foods that are high in iron.

#### Meats

- Beef
- Clams
- Turkey
- Chicken (legs and thighs)
- Fish\*
- Shrimp\*
- Lamb
- Pork

#### Non-Meat Foods

- Enriched cereals with added iron
- Beans
- Dried peas and lentils
- Hummus
- Dried fruits like raisins, prunes, apricots, figs
- Tofu
- Egg yolks
- Whole grain or enriched cereal, bread, pasta, tortillas, rice, cooked cereal
- Dark green vegetables like collards, spinach, chard, kale, broccoli

### Your Child's Iron Needs

Low iron can affect a child's learning, memory, and behavior. What causes a child to have low iron?

- Drinking too much milk or juice
- Eating too much junk food
- Drinking from a bottle after one year of age
- Picky eating

Offer your child plenty of iron-rich foods to boost his or her iron intake.

\* Pregnant women should limit cooked fish and seafood consumption to no more than 12 ounces per week. Canned white tuna should be limited to less than 6 ounces per week.

## Absorb More Iron with Vitamin C

Eat foods rich in vitamin C with foods rich in iron at the same meal. Vitamin C helps your body use more of the iron in the foods you eat. Foods rich in vitamin C include:

- Oranges
- Strawberries
- Cantaloupe
- Watermelon
- Kiwi fruit
- Mango
- Tomatoes
- 100% fruit juice with vitamin C
- Bell peppers
- Cabbage
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower

## Boost Your Iron Absorption:

- Cook in cast iron pots and skillets, which will increase the iron in foods.

- Drink coffee and tea in between meals, not with meals. They can keep your body from absorbing iron when consumed together.

- Tell your health care provider if you crave or consume a lot of ice, popsicles, or slushies. This may be a sign of iron deficiency.

- Eat a little meat with meals. A little meat helps your body absorb more iron. Try chili, spaghetti with meat sauce, or beef stew.

## If You Are Pregnant...

Your body makes more blood when you are pregnant for both you and your baby. This means your body needs extra iron. Eat plenty of iron rich foods and take a prenatal vitamin that will give you extra iron.

Your healthcare provider may recommend taking an iron supplement. Iron supplements can cause constipation. Make sure you drink plenty of water. Taking smaller doses of iron throughout the day rather than taking it all at once can help.

*Not getting enough iron during pregnancy can increase the risk of your baby being born too early or smaller than normal.*