

A practical guide for dietitians

Other sources of iron

A more sustainable diet does not necessarily have to exclude red meat or dairy altogether – therefore meat and dairy nutrient intakes need not be compromised.

This information sheet provides some useful and practical guidance with regard to plant food sources of nutrients associated with meat and dairy consumption.

Iron is important to help prevent tiredness, support your immune system and especially important for brain development.¹

Did you know?

- Eating more sustainably, as per the Eatwell guide where red meat is reduced to no more than 70g per person per day, will not compromise current iron status.²
- Iron deficiency anaemia (low haemoglobin levels) is no greater in vegetarians and vegans compared to meat eaters.
- Although iron stores (ferritin levels) in vegetarians and vegans is significantly lower when compared to meat eaters, they are still within the normal range.
- The body increases dietary iron absorption when status is low and / or at times of higher demand e.g. pregnancy.
- Iron from high phytate plant sources, is less bioavailable, but over time, the body optimises iron utilisation and reduces excretion.
- Phytates iron inhibitory factors can be reduced by including a vitamin C food or drink alongside plant iron sources. Additionally, food processes such as soaking, sprouting, high temperature treatments (e.g. canning), milling and yeast leavening helps to reduce phytate content of food and therefore improve plant iron absorption.

How much do we need?

| | DRV for iron mg ³ | | Who needs to up their intakes? |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| | Male | Female | |
| 2-3 year olds | 6.9 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teenage girls. • Adults – especially women of child-bearing age. Over 75 year olds |
| 4-6 year olds | 6.1 | | |
| 7-10 year olds | 8.7 | | |
| 11-18 year olds | 11.3 | 14.8 | |
| 19 – 64 year olds | 8.7 | 14.8 <50y & 8.7 >50y | |
| 65 year and older* | 8.7 | | |



Top tips for optimising iron status

- Include iron rich plant foods with all meals and snacks.
- Include a source of vitamin C with meals in the form of salad, fruit or fruit juice.
- Include starchy root vegetables, tubers or fruit with your meals – lower in phytates but high in fibre.
- Use canned beans and pulses and rinse well or soak dried beans and discard water.
- Avoid tea and coffee around meal times (around 2 hours either side).
- Iron or zinc dietary supplements should only be recommended to individuals who have iron deficient anaemia or at high risk and dietary iron intakes will not suffice.
- How to add an iron boost to meals and snack times:
 - Breakfast time: fortified breakfast cereals, wheatgerm toast, beans on toast. Serve with a small glass of fruit juice.
 - Lunch: falafel, humous, bean salad, jacket potato and baked beans, peanut butter on toast. Accompany your lunch with lots of salads or a piece of fruit.
 - Dinner: Add beans, nuts and/or seeds to your main meal, serve with a salad or glass of fruit juice and some green vegetables like kale, peas or baby spinach.
 - Snacks: nuts, seeds and dried fruit like apricots are a great choice.

Plant food sources of iron⁴

| Food | Serving size household | Serving size g | Iron mg /serving |
|---|------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Fortified breakfast cereals | Small bowl | 30g | 2.8 – 4.4 |
| Porridge oats | 2-3 tbsp | 30g | 1.1 |
| Wheatgerm bread | 2 slices | 80g | 2.3 |
| Wholemeal bread | 2 slices | 80g | 1.9 |
| | | | |
| Soya beans, boiled and drained | 4 tbsp | 100g | 3 |
| Baked beans, canned in tomato sauce | Small can | 200g | 2.8 |
| Red lentils, boiled | 4 tbsp | 100g | 2.4 |
| Red kidney beans, canned and drained | 4 tbsp | 100g | 2 |
| Butter beans, canned and drained | 4 tbsp | 100g | 1.5 |
| Chickpeas, canned and drained | 4 tbsp | 100g | 1.5 |
| | | | |
| Soya bean nuts (roasted edamame beans) ⁵ | Small handful | 25g | 1.0 |
| | | | |
| Kale, boiled and drained | 4 heaped tbsp | 80g | 1.6 |
| Baby spinach | Small cereal bowl | 80g | 1.5 |
| Peas, frozen and boiled | 3 heaped tbsp | 80g | 1.5 |
| | | | |



One Blue Dot Other Sources: Iron

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----|-----|
| Dried figs | 2-3 | 30g | 1.2 |
| Raisins | 1 heaped tbsp | 30g | 1.1 |
| Dried apricots | 3-4 | 30g | 1 |
| Prunes, dried | 3-4 | 30g | 0.8 |
| Prunes, canned | 6 | 80g | 1.8 |
| | | | |
| Cashew nuts | Handful | 30g | 1.9 |
| Hazelnuts | Handful | 30g | 1 |
| Pistachios / almonds / walnuts | Handful | 30g | 0.9 |
| Peanuts | Handful | 30g | 0.6 |
| Peanut butter - smooth | Thickly spread on 2 slices | 40g | 0.8 |
| | | | |
| Tahini paste | 1 heaped tsp | 19g | 2.0 |
| Sesame seeds | 1 tbsp | 7g | 0.7 |
| Pumpkin seeds | 1 tbsp | 10g | 1.0 |
| | | | |
| Hummus | 2 tbsp | 60g | 1.1 |
| Falafel | 2 | 60g | 1.7 |

Animal protein comparisons:

70g serving of beef = 2-2.5mg iron

70g serving of lamb = 1.3 – 1.8mg iron

Large egg = 1.3mg iron

Useful links

Click [here](#) to access the One Blue Dot Nutritional Considerations: Iron document which summarises the evidence around protein intakes in the UK.

References

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