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Iron

Advice for children and young people



Why is iron needed in the body?

Iron is very important for growth and development in babies and young children



It helps to keep red blood cells healthy. These cells carry oxygen around the body



A shortage in iron is known as iron deficiency anaemia and is a common condition amongst babies and young children



Symptoms include tiredness, poor concentration, pale skin, and loss of appetite. However some children have no symptoms at all



The body absorbs iron from the food we eat and therefore an important way to prevent anaemia is to ensure that a child's diet contains plenty of iron rich foods

How much iron does my child need?

Group	Age	Amount of Iron per day	
		Girls	Boys
Infants	Under 1 year	8mg	8mg
Children	1-3 years	7mg	7mg
	4-6 years	6mg	6mg
	7-10 years	8.7mg	8.7mg
Adolescents	11-18 years	14.8mg	11.3mg

The iron content of milk

For the majority of babies' breast milk or formula milk will provide all the iron required for the first 6 months of life.

Although cow's milk is important in your child's diet it is low in iron and therefore should not be given as the main drink before 12 months of age. From 12 months offer no more than 400ml (about 13oz) of milk a day. From 2-4 years old, children only need about 300-350ml (10-12oz) a day. This is because children who drink a lot of milk often do not consume enough iron rich foods. Cow's milk can be used in cooking from 6 months of age.

Iron absorption

Some foods such as vitamin C can help the body to absorb iron whilst others reduce it.

To maximise the amount of iron absorbed choose foods rich in vitamin C at mealtimes.

Foods high in vitamin C:

- ❖ Fruit and fruit juices e.g. oranges, tangerines, berries, kiwi, strawberries, blackcurrants
- ❖ Squash drinks with added vitamin C
- ❖ Potatoes
- ❖ Vegetables e.g. peppers, broccoli, peas

Foods that affect iron absorption

- ❖ Avoid giving young children tea or coffee as these drinks reduce the body's ability to absorb iron
- ❖ Too much fibre can reduce the absorption of iron. Offer a mixture of wholemeal and white products to your child e.g. granary, white and wholemeal breads rice and pasta.
- ❖ Discourage sugary drinks, as they can reduce appetite and therefore further reduce a child's intake of foods containing iron.

Sources of dietary iron

There are two main sources of iron in the diet.

1) Animal sources e.g. red meat, liver, oily fish.



2) Non animal sources e.g. beans, pulses & lentils, fortified breakfast cereals, vegetables.



The most easily absorbed form of iron is found in animal products. Vegetarian foods also contain iron however the body does not absorb it as readily.

Good Sources of iron

Excellent Sources	Faggots, Liver, Kidney. Liver or chicken pâté. Liver sausages
Very Good Sources	Red meat e.g. beef, lamb, pork, corned/minced beef, beef burgers. Oily fish e.g. salmon, trout, mackerel, kippers, sardines (canned or fresh). Fortified breakfast cereals e.g. Cornflakes, Rice Krispies, Weetabix. Smooth peanut butter or ground nuts. N.B. Do not give whole nuts to children under 5 years due to choking risk. Do not give nuts if your child is allergic or there is a strong family history of allergy.
Good Sources	Peas, beans & pulses e.g. baked beans, kidney beans, green beans, chickpeas, lentils & hummus. Eggs, ensure eggs are fully cooked for babies and young children. Green leafy vegetables e.g. broccoli, peas, cabbage & spinach. Dried fruit e.g. apricots, prunes, raisins & sultanas. Bread e.g. bread, rolls, chapatti, wholemeal & granary options.



Meal suggestions to maximise the iron content of your child's daily intake

Breakfast ideas

- ❖ Fortified breakfast cereal with milk & half a glass of fruit juice diluted with water
- ❖ Boiled/poached egg (well cooked) & slice of wholemeal bread
- ❖ Baked beans on toast
- ❖ Lean bacon with tinned tomatoes & toast

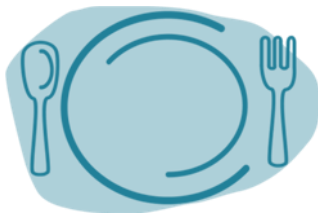
Lunches and main meals

- ❖ Sandwiches filled with beef/ ham/ egg mayo
- ❖ Mackerel in tomato sauce on toast
- ❖ Baked potato (with the skin) with baked beans & grated cheese
- ❖ Scrambled egg (well cooked) with toast & chopped tomato
- ❖ Tinned salmon with pasta
- ❖ Grilled beefburger in a bun with salad
- ❖ Spaghetti bolognaise with mince meat
- ❖ Lentil curry with rice
- ❖ Roast lamb dinner with potatoes & green vegetables
- ❖ Beef/lamb casserole with vegetables & mashed potato

- ❖ Corned beef hash with peas
- ❖ Omelette with small baked potato
- ❖ Cottage pie with broccoli/peas

Snacks

- ❖ Cucumber/carrot sticks with hummus
- ❖ Small bowl of fortified breakfast cereal with berries
- ❖ Dried apricots or raisins
- ❖ Wholegrain/plain crackers with pâté/ham slices
- ❖ Boiled egg (well cooked) cut into quarters
- ❖ Fruit salad
- ❖ Vitamin C- enriched squash with peanut butter on toast
- ❖ Tinned salmon sandwich with tangerine



Contacts

If you require further information about any information contained within this leaflet please contact your nearest Paediatric Dietitian on the numbers below:

Royal Gwent Hospital	01633 234288
Nevill Hall Hospital	01873 732620
Serennu Children's Centre	01633 748026
Caephilly Children's Centre	02920 867447

Notes

Written and adapted by ABUHB Dietitians
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