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Iron Rich Foods

Why do pregnant women need iron

The food a woman eats before and during pregnancy helps her body to nourish not only herself but baby as well. For most pregnant women eating a variety of healthy foods is not an issue. However many women struggle with morning sickness or may have dietary restrictions due to medical conditions and/ or religious or cultural beliefs. These reasons can make it difficult for her to eat certain foods which are rich in iron, i.e. (meat, poultry, and fish, grains).

It is not unusual for a pregnant woman to have an aversion to certain foods such as meat during pregnancy, especially if she has nausea and vomiting. So the key is to find alternate iron rich food sources that she can tolerate.

A pregnant woman's iron needs are high during pregnancy. Her body makes about an extra 2kg (4lbs) of blood during pregnancy. She needs higher amounts of iron to make this happen.

A prenatal multivitamin with folic acid and iron is recommended to help her body to maintain the iron she needs, BUT it cannot do it all. In order to do this a woman must look at eating a well-balanced diet which includes iron rich foods.

- The % Daily Value (% DV) that you will notice mentioned for each food lets you know if a food has a little or a lot of iron per serving.
- 5% value or less – considered little value
- 15% value or more – considered a lot
- You want more of fiber, iron, calcium, and vitamin C
- And less of fat, sugar and sodium (salt)

Note: factors that affect the absorption of iron: Vitamin C (foods rich in Vitamin C) improves iron absorption and phytates/tannins found in coffee and tea inhibits the absorption of iron.

Calcium and iron affect each other's bioavailability; however this is NOT a critical food to food interaction.

In other words: if you put milk on your oatmeal for breakfast you will still benefit from the iron in the oatmeal, BUT taking an iron supplement with calcium rich foods (milk) your iron source will not be well utilized. Similarly, if you take an iron supplement at the same time as you take a calcium and / or prenatal vitamin, it will inhibit the utilization of the iron.

Below is a list of Iron Rich Foods, while some women may not be able to tolerate some of these or just plain dislike them, it is the hope that there is something on the list you can and will eat. 😊

Iron Rich Foods:

Daily value (DV) 15% or higher

1. **Soy Beans:** While there is a lot of conflicting information about soy during pregnancy, it is a food rich in iron, and considered safe in reasonable amounts. Soybeans are very versatile and great in soups, or chilies.
Serving size: 1 cup (250mls) Boiled / cooked = 8.8 milligrams of iron (49% DV); 298 calories
2. **Black- Eyed Peas:** like other legumes, a rich source of iron. Also contain Vitamin C.
Serving Size: 1 cup (250mls) Boiled / cooked = 4.3 milligrams of iron (25%DV); 220 calories
3. **Sunflower Seeds:** have not only iron but have essential minerals and an impressive supply of Vitamin E. Choose the unsalted version to help limit your sodium intake.
Serving size: 1 cup (250 mls) 7.4 milligrams of iron (41% DV); 269 calories
4. **Spinach:** can be eaten raw, but cooking it provides greater amounts of iron.
Serving Size: 1 cup (250mls) = 6.4 milligrams of iron (36% DV) 41 calories.
5. **Potatoes:** also packed with Vitamin C – which helps your body absorb the iron it needs.
Serving size: 1 medium potato with skin = 3.2 milligrams of iron (18% DV); 278 calories
6. **Lentils:** packed with iron, protein and amino acids. Easy to cook. Can spice up soups, stews, pastas, and more.
Serving: 1 cup, boiled = 6.6 milligrams of iron; (37%DV); 230 calories
7. **Pinto Beans:** pair with whole wheat rice, or enjoy with favorite veggies.
Serving: 1 cup (boiled) = 3.6 milligrams of iron (21% DV); 245 calories
8. **Black Beans:** easy on the budget. Loaded with fiber, protein and iron. That means that they can satisfy hunger while providing an energy boost. Add to salads, soups, stews, chilies, stir-fries.
Serving size: 1 cup/ 250 mls (boiled) = 3.6 milligrams of iron (20% DV); 277 calories
9. **Sun Dried Tomatoes:** Not only high in iron but also lycopene, antioxidants and Vitamin C.
Serving Size: 1 cup (250 mls) = 4.9 milligrams of iron (27% DV); 139 calories
10. **Lima Beans:** Should NEVER be consumed Raw. When cooked a great source of iron, that adds a unique flavor which can be enjoyed as is or to be enhanced with your favorite herbs and spices.
Serving size: 1 cup (250 mls) – COOKED = 4.5 milligrams of iron (25% DV); 216 calories.
11. **Prune Juice:** High in iron and vitamin C (which makes it easier for your body to absorb the iron), Bonus- it is a healthy natural choice that may help with constipation.
Serving size: 1 cup (250mls) = 3 milligrams of iron. (17% DV); 182 calories
12. ***Dark Chocolate:** while rich in iron it should be eaten in moderation. The sugar and caffeine content found in chocolate are NOT the best choice while pregnant. But a treat once in a while is a nice way to give your iron a boost.
Serving size: 100 grams = 6.3 milligrams of iron (35% DV) 578 calories
13. **Tofu:** has the wonderful ability to take on flavors of the sauces and seasonings it's prepared with; just choose your favorite ingredients and go from there.
Serving size: ½ cup (125 mls) 3.4 milligrams of iron (19% DV); 88 calories

Daily value (DV) – 5.1% to 14.9% range

14. **Collard Greens:** * High in Vitamin A levels, vitamin C and IRON, but balanced in such a way that it is safe to eat; you will be full before you overdose. The vitamin C in collard greens makes it easier for your body to absorb the iron.
Serving: 1cup = 2.2 milligrams of iron ;(12% DV) 11 calories
15. **Oatmeal:** Fantastic health food, rich in iron and other nutrients. Easy healthy breakfast food, but can be used in granola, and a variety of baked goodies. Note: by doing your own baking you can control the amount of calories by limiting the sugar content and or using healthy alternatives (unsweetened apple sauce and oatmeal cookies ---Yum!)
Serving Size: ½ cup = 1.7 milligrams of iron (8% DV); 154 calories
16. **Dried Apricots:** Can be consumed raw, canned, cooked, but the most benefit is dried. When dried they lose their high water and sugar contents without losing the nutritious qualities – the iron.
Serving size: ½ cup = 2 milligrams of iron (8% DV); 78 calories
17. **Raisins:** contains large amounts of iron – easy to add to cereal, yogurt, salads
Serving: ½ cup = 1.6 milligrams of iron; (9% DV) 247 calories
18. **Dried Peaches:** a serving of dried peaches contains about 9% of your daily recommended iron, without weighing you down with lots of sugar and calories. Great breakfast companion, delicious in salads and easy snack throughout the day.
Serving: ¼ cup = 1.6 milligrams of iron; (9% DV); 96 calories
19. **Strawberries:** fresh is best but cooked or frozen works too.
Serving size: 1 pint = 1.5 milligrams of iron (9% DV); 114 calories
20. **Dried Thyme:** One of the most iron-rich herbs can be used as seasoning in salads, stews, soups, veggie dips. It has a unique lemon-pepper flavor – let your cooking imagination go wild.
Serving: 1 teaspoon = 1.2 milligrams of iron; (7% DV); 3 calories
21. **Kale:** is Fat Free, (a vegetable in the same grain as broccoli, collard greens and Brussels sprouts). If you don't like it raw – try sautéing it, throw it in soup, on a burger, or kale chips in your oven or dehydrator.
Serving size: 1 cup (250 mls) 1.1 milligrams of iron (6% DV); 1.3 calories
22. **Peas:** fresh or cooked they are rich in iron.
Serving size: ½ cup (125ml) = 1.2 milligrams of iron (7% DV); 62 calories

Daily value (DV) – 5% or less per serving

23. **Brussels sprouts:** Is an excellent source of iron as well as a variable source of antioxidants, vitamins, folate, and fiber.
Serving Size: ½ cup = 0.9milligrams of iron; (5% DV) 28 calories
24. **Pumpkin Seeds:** provide the most benefit when eaten raw, but still pack an iron punch when roasted for no more than 15-20 minutes. Great on salads, easy snack.
Serving: 1 ounce (about a handful) = 0.9milligrams of iron ;(5% DV); 126 calories
25. **Brown rice:** Very versatile food. Naturally rich in fiber and high iron content.
Serving size: 1 cup = 0.8milligrams of iron (5% DV); 216 calories
26. **Molasses:** great way to switch things up – rich in iron. Great on toast, waffles, pancakes, sandwiches, or add it to water or even a glass of milk. Serving size: 1 tablespoon = 0.9 milligrams of iron (5% DV); 58 calories

27. **Whole Wheat Breads:** great source of fiber (a bonus if constipation is an issue), B vitamins, protein, and Iron. Unlike white bread it manages hunger for longer while keeping your blood sugar in check. If you are worried about getting enough iron, but endless supplies of iron-rich veggies leave your appetite unsatisfied – or you are too nauseated to look at and eat them, a slice of whole wheat bread can fill that need. Small frequent meals are recommended to help with nausea. A slice of whole wheat bread will not only help your iron intake – it can help you to feel full longer, satisfy the carbohydrate craving to help with the nausea, all the while providing a bit of an energy boost.
Serving size: 1 slice = .7 milligrams of iron (4% DV); 69 calories
28. **Whole Wheat Pasta:** good way to curb craving of carbs while getting magnesium, calcium, potassium and IRON. * While white pasta contains these as well it can weigh you down with extra carb and calories.
Serving: ¼ cup dry (prior to cooking) = 0.4 milligrams of iron ;(2% DV) 44 calories
29. **Sesame Butter (Tahini):** also known as Tahini. Can be eaten as is, or use it with vegetables or to dress up your salad.
Serving: 1 tablespoon= 0.4milligrams of iron ;(2% DV); 86 calories
30. **Broccoli:** huge role in helping your body absorb and digest the essential iron. Also contains Vitamin C.
Serving Size: ½ cup (125 mls) =0.3 milligrams of iron (2%DV); 15 calories
31. **Arugula:** adding several servings to diet each week can help improve the health of red blood cells. Enjoy as a salad, or in soups, pizza toppings and sautéed with pasta or other dishes.
Serving: ½ cup = 0.146 milligrams of iron; (1.8% DV); 3 calories