



A cooking and nutrition Fact Sheet

Pumping Up Your Iron Intake: Go for food first, supplements second

Iron is an important nutrient for everyone - from tiny babies to active seniors. Iron helps your body carry oxygen. Iron is also critically important in learning and in fighting disease. Food is the #1 place to get iron and other nutrients because:

- Nutrients that your body uses at the same time, like iron, zinc and protein, are often found in the same food.
- Many nutrients are better absorbed from food than pills.
- Food provides the energy you need along with GREAT taste!

Before you pop an iron supplement, use these tasty tips to pump up your iron intake.

High Iron Foods

Choose high iron foods from all the layers of MyPyramid

- Look for iron fortified and whole grain breads and cereals
- Enjoy more broccoli, spinach, prunes, raisins and dried apricots
- Choose lean meats, like beef cuts from the round and loin.
- Eat plenty of other protein foods, like dried beans, poultry and fish.

Vitamin C Foods

Foods that are high in Vitamin C can help enhance the absorption of iron

- Enjoy fortified hot or cold cereal and orange juice for breakfast.
- Top pancakes or toaster waffles with fresh or frozen strawberries.
- Warm up at lunch with a bowl of bean soup and a green salad.
- Enjoy peanut butter on whole wheat bread with orange slices.

Meat Factor

Meats, like beef and pork, increase iron absorption from other foods

- Enjoy a stir fry supper with lean round steak and broccoli.
- Add a few slices of BBQ beef to beans and tortillas for fajitas.
- Slice leftover steak, roast or ham into salad greens for lunch.
- Add a few slices of smoked beef, turkey or ham to bean soup.

Cast Iron Pots

This is NOT an old wives' tale - cast iron cookware does add iron to food.

- Cook acidic foods, like those with tomato sauce, in cast iron pans.
- The longer foods cook in cast iron, the more iron they have.
- Create chili with beans, tomatoes and ground beef in a cast iron pan.
- Use a cast iron skillet even for quick cooking items, like eggs.

Information courtesy of Eat Right Montana
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Montana State University Extension