

Iron-Clad Facts for Adolescents

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Why is iron important?

Your body needs iron to work properly. When you don't have enough iron in your diet, you can become *anemic*, causing you to feel tired. Anemia is a common problem for teenagers.

Athletes with low iron levels may notice that they are not able to perform as well. Iron is also important for proper brain function.

Getting enough iron will help your body work its best.

How can you make sure your body is getting enough iron?

It is important to eat iron-rich foods every day.

Adolescent girls need about 14 mg iron per day and boys need about 11 mg per day.

GOOD SOURCES OF IRON

Animal Sources

3-oz red meat (hamburger or steak) provides 3-7 mg iron

3-oz chicken, fish, or pork provides 1-3 mg iron

Other Sources (each 1-3mg iron/serving)

Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, 1 cup

Canned baked beans or kidney beans, 1/2 cup

Cooked spinach, 1/2 cup

Cooked enriched pasta, 1 cup

Whole wheat bread, 2 slices

Frozen cooked peas, 1/2 cup

Enriched rice, 1 cup

Your body can use iron from meat or fish more easily, but other food sources of iron are good too. If you are low in iron, your doctor may want you to take an iron supplement or a vitamin with iron.

What will help your body to use the iron in foods you eat?

- Eating foods rich in vitamin C (oranges, grapefruits, tomatoes, broccoli, strawberries) with an iron-rich food
- Cooking food in a cast-iron skillet or pot

What will make it harder for your body to use iron in foods you eat?

- Too much caffeine (coffee, tea, coffee drinks, or caffeinated soda) with a meal
- Too much fiber
- Taking calcium tablets with meals. (If you take a calcium tablet, don't take it with meals.)

Choosing iron-rich foods every day is part of healthy eating!

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