



Iron in foods: why it matters



People need iron because it transports oxygen to the body's organs and tissues. The body uses iron to make new red blood cells. It's also important for healthy cells, skin, hair and nails.

Eating foods that contain iron is important. This is the main way most people get the iron they need.

Iron deficiency: a common problem

Iron-deficiency anemia means you don't have enough iron in your body. It is the most common nutritional deficiency in the U.S. It affects more women than men. Causes of iron-deficiency anemia include:

- Not getting enough iron from foods
- Digestive health problems such as celiac disease, Crohn's and ulcerative colitis which don't allow the body to absorb iron well
- Heavy menstrual periods
- Stomach bleeding, which may be caused by an ulcer or using aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen for long periods of time
- Losing too much blood from surgery, frequent blood tests or an injury

Low iron can be serious

If iron levels get too low, a person may have an increased risk of:

- Depression
- Heart problems
- Infections

Pregnant women who have low iron may deliver their baby too early. Sometimes the baby doesn't grow as much as they should.

Children who don't get enough iron can have problems with learning, thinking and developing their motor (movement) skills.