

Iron-rich foods list (printable)

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Iron figures are milligrams (mg) of iron per 100 g of food, from McCance and Widdowson's Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset (CoFID), 2021, Public Health England / Food Standards Agency. Reference daily amounts and supplement advice are from the NHS.

How much iron you need each day (NHS):

- Women aged 19 to 49: 14.8 mg a day
- Women aged 50 and over, and men aged 19 and over: 8.7 mg a day
- Women who still have periods after 50 may need the higher amount.

Two kinds of iron:

- Haem iron (from animal foods) is absorbed more readily.
- Non-haem iron (from plant foods) is absorbed less readily, so the tips below matter more for it.

Haem iron (animal foods), mg per 100 g

- Chicken liver, fried: 11.3 mg (avoid liver in pregnancy: too much vitamin A)
- Lamb liver, fried: 7.7 mg (avoid liver in pregnancy)
- Venison, roast: 5.1 mg
- Anchovies, canned in oil, drained: 4.1 mg
- Mussels, cooked: 3.25 mg
- Crab, canned in brine, drained: 2.8 mg
- Sardines, canned in brine, drained: 2.73 mg
- Beef topside, roasted, lean: 2.5 mg
- Beef mince, stewed: about 2.3 to 2.4 mg
- Beef sirloin steak, fried, lean: 2.3 mg
- Lamb leg, roasted, lean: 2.3 mg
- Eggs, whole, boiled: 1.97 mg

Non-haem iron (plant and fortified foods), mg per 100 g

- Sesame seeds: 10.4 mg (tahini paste: 10.6 mg)

- Pumpkin seeds: 10.0 mg
- Sunflower seeds: 6.4 mg
- Cashew nuts, plain: 6.2 mg
- Dried apricots: 4.1 mg
- Almonds, whole: 3.71 mg
- Porridge oats, unfortified: 3.64 mg
- Soya beans, boiled: 3.0 mg
- Prunes: 2.9 mg
- Baby spinach, boiled: 2.63 mg (mature spinach, boiled: 1.6 mg)
- Edamame beans, boiled: 2.73 mg
- Red kidney beans, canned, drained: 2.26 mg
- Raisins: 2.21 mg
- Red lentils, boiled: 2.14 mg
- Green or brown lentils, boiled: 2.11 mg
- Wholemeal bread: 2.4 mg
- Dark (plain) chocolate: 2.3 mg
- Peanut butter, smooth: 2.1 mg
- Chickpeas, canned, drained: 1.9 mg
- Houmous: 1.9 mg
- Wholewheat pasta, boiled: 1.48 mg
- Baked beans in tomato sauce: 1.42 mg
- Tofu, steamed: 1.2 mg

Fortified breakfast cereals are a notable non-haem source: fortified wheat biscuits (Weetabix type) about 11.9 mg per 100 g and fortified cornflakes about 11.8 mg per 100 g, but the same cereal unfortified has far less (unfortified cornflakes about 0.4 mg), so check the label.

Getting more iron from your food

Help absorption:

- Pair non-haem (plant) iron with a source of vitamin C in the same meal, such as peppers, citrus, tomatoes or a glass of orange juice (NHS; British Dietetic Association).
- Eating a little animal protein alongside plant iron also helps (British Dietetic Association).

Reduce absorption (so time these away from iron-rich meals):

- Tea and coffee (tannins). Avoid drinking tea during or just after a meal (British Dietetic Association).
- Bran and other high-phytate foods.
- Calcium, including milk and calcium supplements, taken at the same time.

Safety

- Do not start an iron supplement on a hunch. The NHS advises confirming low iron with a blood test first, because too much iron can be harmful.
- Consuming more than 20 mg of iron a day (from supplements) can cause side effects such as constipation, nausea, vomiting and stomach pain. The Department of Health advises that 17 mg or less a day of iron supplements is unlikely to cause harm; take more only if a doctor advises it.
- Very high doses of iron can be fatal, particularly for children. Keep supplements out of reach.

Sources:

- Iron food figures: McCance and Widdowson's Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset (CoFID) 2021, Public Health England.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/composition-of-foods-integrated-dataset-cofid>
- Daily amounts, absorption and safety: NHS, Vitamins and minerals: Iron.
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/iron/>
- Absorption tips: British Dietetic Association, Iron food fact sheet.
<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/iron-rich-foods-iron-deficiency.html>

Information only, not medical advice. Speak to your GP or pharmacist before starting an iron supplement.