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## IRON AND YOUR BODY

### It's in Your Blood!

Iron is a trace mineral but don't let that word trace fool you, iron is essential to life. Most of the iron found in the human body is in the blood as part of hemoglobin. It is also found in body muscle, in enzymes that release energy and some is even stored in the liver, the spleen and the bone marrow.

### Why is Iron so Important?

Iron is needed to build red blood cells and it gives them that rich red colour that everyone thinks of as healthy blood. The most important role that iron plays in the body is to carry oxygen to the cells to keep them alive and doing what they're supposed to do. Put very simply, as the **heme** part of hemoglobin, picks up the oxygen that we inhale into our lungs, takes it to the tissues and cells that need it to keep going, and after releasing the oxygen, picks up the carbon dioxide and brings it back to the lungs so that we can get rid of it when we breathe out.

### What Happens if My Body Doesn't Get Enough Iron?

The amount of iron that we need everyday depends on how much is lost from the body and on the body's needs for growth. So, an older adult needs less iron than a pregnant woman. Menstruating women need more iron as they need to replace the iron lost in monthly bleeding. Young children, whose bodies are still growing, also need a lot of iron for such a small body.

If you do not give your body enough iron, iron deficiency anemia can develop. Today, this is the most common deficiency among women and young children.

### Are All Forms of Iron in Foods Used by My Body?

Iron in foods is found in two forms - **heme** and **non-heme**. Heme iron is best used by the body and is found in meat, poultry and fish. These foods also contain non-heme iron which although good, is not as well used by the body. Other sources of non-heme iron include: green leafy vegetables, dried fruits, beans, peas and lentils, and enriched breads and grain products.

### How Can I Help My Body to Get the Most from the Iron I Eat?

The heme and non-heme iron in the foods you eat will be better used by your body if:

- a good source of vitamin C is consumed with the iron (e.g. pork and tomatoes, iron-rich breakfast cereal with a glass of orange juice)
- heme and non-heme are served together (e.g. chilli with beef and beans)
- coffee and/or tea are not consumed at the same meal. They contain substances that prevent the body from using the iron. Wait at least 1 hour before having one of these drinks



## Body Balance... It's Your Choice

### Some Sources of Iron

<b>Excellent</b> <u>&gt;2.0 mg per serving</u>	<b>Good</b> <u>1.0 - 2.0 mg per serving</u>	<b>Fair</b> <u>&lt;1.0 mg per serving</u>
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Liver, pork - 3 oz	Egg - 1 large	Wheat Germ - 1 Tbsp
Liver, beef - 3 oz	Broccoli – ½ cup	Rice, parboiled - 1 cup
Liver, chicken - 3 oz	Chicken - 3 oz	Molasses, table - 1 Tbsp
Kidney Beans - 1 cup	Macaroni, enriched - 1 cup	Raisins – ¼ cup
Asparagus, canned – ½ cup	Rolled oats, dry – ½ cup	Dates – ¼ cup
Beef, lean - 3 oz	Dried Apricots - 10 halves	
Potato, baked - 1 large	Dried Peaches – ¼ cup	
Blackstrap Molasses - 1		
Oysters - 5 small		

### Great Ways To Add Iron!

#### **Use whole grains**

Try adding oatmeal to your meat loaf and meatballs instead of breadcrumbs. Replace corn flakes with bran flakes in recipes. Also, don't forget that whole wheat bread contains more iron than white bread.

#### **Use beans more often**

Make dishes such as chilli, baked beans, lentil soup and split pea soup a part of your weekly menu planning. Try adding chick peas or kidney beans to other dishes and soups. If your family isn't too familiar with beans, mash them into the dish and no-one will know.

#### **Use wheat germ**

Add wheat germ to all your favourite recipes. It makes a great crunchy topping for a main dish or dessert.

#### **Use dried fruits**

Dates, raisins, apricots and currants, either eaten as a snack, or added to recipes will increase the iron.

#### **Don't forget**

You'll need vitamin C rich foods with all of the above suggestions to get the iron benefit.

### Don't Forget the Liver

Here's a great liver recipe that's packed with iron!

#### **Liver Fricassee**

1 lb	sliced beef liver	450 grams
½ cup	flour	125 ml
½ tsp	salt	2ml
pinch	pepper	pinch
1-2 Tbsp	vegetable oil	15 - 30 ml
2 cups	canned tomatoes	500 ml
1	green pepper, chopped	1
3	medium onions, chopped	3
1	celery stick, diced	1
½ tsp	chilli powder	2 ml

- Mix flour, salt and pepper in a small bowl. • Coat the liver with this flour mixture.
- Brown the liver in a pan with the vegetable oil. • Drain off any excess fat.
- Add tomatoes, vegetables and chilli powder to the liver in the pan.
- Cover and simmer for 45 minutes

**Serves 4**

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