

## Nutrition & Food Services

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# IRON

Iron is an important mineral found in blood which is responsible for carrying oxygen around the body. Iron deficiency anaemia is when the blood cannot carry enough oxygen because iron levels are too low.

## WHERE DO WE GET IRON FROM?

Iron comes from certain foods that we eat. To improve blood iron levels you should eat a variety of foods which contain iron every day.

## BEST SOURCES – HAEM IRON

The iron contained in these foods *is well absorbed* by the body.

- Meats e.g. beef, lamb, kangaroo, pork
- Poultry e.g. chicken, turkey
- Fish and shellfish.
- Offal e.g. liver and kidney (pate\* is not recommended for children under 1 year)

## GOOD SOURCES – NON HAEM IRON

The iron in these foods is not as well absorbed by the body as the Haem Iron sources listed above:

- Wholegrain cereals, e.g. bread and breakfast cereals
- Breakfast cereals (with added iron)
- Baked beans, chickpeas, dried peas, dried beans, lentils
- Green leafy vegetables e.g. spinach, broccoli,
- Dried fruit eg. sultanas, apricots, dates, prunes
- Eggs
- Peanut butter
- Nuts (*whole nuts are not recommended for children under the age of 5*)\*\*

## **VITAMIN C CONTAINING FOODS**

Foods containing Vitamin C improve the iron absorption from other foods. Try to include foods from the list below at the same meal:

- Fruits e.g. oranges, mandarins, berries, kiwi fruit, strawberries.
- Vegetables e.g. capsicum, tomato, broccoli, cabbage.

## **GUIDELINES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING IRON DEFICIENCY**

1. Breastfeeding or an iron containing infant formula is recommended for children under the age of one as the main source of milk.
2. Introduce solids at around 6 months. Iron rich foods including iron-fortified cereals, pureed meat and chicken are recommended to optimise iron intake at this time. Ensure that the texture of the food is suitable for your child's developmental stage.
3. Cow's milk can be introduced as the main drink from 12 months. Avoid giving too much cow's milk (no more than 600ml each day) as it is a poor source of iron and can reduce your child's appetite for other foods.
4. Include iron containing foods every day, particularly from the "best source" list.
5. Try and include Vitamin C rich foods when eating foods from the "good source" list.
6. Encourage a wide variety of foods.

## **TRY SOME OF THESE IDEAS TO BOOST YOUR CHILD'S IRON INTAKE**

1. Choose a breakfast cereal with added iron e.g. baby rice cereal or Weetbix.
2. Spread peanut butter (smooth), pate\* or fish paste on toast or plain biscuits.
3. Add Milo or Ovaltine (both contain iron) to milk drinks.
4. Thicken homemade soups with dried peas, beans or lentils.
5. Use wholemeal breads rather than white breads.
6. Try some dried fruit or nuts\*\* at snack times.
7. Consider baked beans on wholemeal toast with a piece of fruit.
8. Offer cold meats such as ham or chicken at snack times.
9. Continue to give your child iron supplements if they have been prescribed. Don't start iron supplements yourself- speak to a doctor first.