

## Dietary Sources of Iron

### What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that helps build healthy blood. Its main function is to help carry oxygen throughout your body. There are two types of iron in food: HEME iron and NON-HEME iron.

### Symptoms of low iron stores:

- Lack of energy or feeling weak
- Feeling light headed or dizzy
- Thin and brittle nails and pale skin
- Low blood pressure with change in position
- More short of breath or faster heart rate



### Sources of iron in the diet:

- **HEME iron:** Most easily absorbed in the blood
  - Found in meat, fish and poultry
    - Very good sources of HEME iron (3.5 milligrams or more per serving):
      - 3 ounces of beef or chicken liver
      - 3 ounces of clams, mussels or oysters
    - Good sources of HEME iron (2 milligrams or more per serving):
      - 3 ounces beef, pork or dark meat turkey
      - 3 ounces of shrimp
    - Fair sources of HEME iron (1 milligrams or more per serving):
      - 3 ounces of chicken or white meat turkey or 1 large egg
      - 3 ounces of halibut, haddock, perch, salmon or tuna
- **NON-HEME iron:** Not as easily absorbed as HEME iron.
  - Found mainly in fruits, vegetables, dried beans, nuts and fortified grain products
    - Lentils or canned white beans (3.5 milligrams or more per serving). Look for no salt added.
    - Iron fortified cereals (some contain 18 milligrams per serving)
      - Such as Total<sup>®</sup>, 100% bran flakes, Grapenuts<sup>®</sup> and Product 19<sup>®</sup>

### Tips to increase iron absorption from NON-HEME foods:

- Combine these with foods high in Vitamin C such as:
  - Oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, cantaloupe, mango and some fruit juices
  - Tomatoes, tomato juice (unsalted or low sodium), broccoli, cabbage and green peppers
- Combine NON-HEME with HEME foods
- Cook NON-HEME foods in a cast iron skillet

**Factors that decrease NON-HEME iron absorption:**

- Tea and coffee consumed with meals
- Excess intake of high fiber foods or bran supplements
- High intake of calcium
  - Take your calcium supplement at a different time from your iron supplement



Vitamin C rich vegetables.



Red meat.



Dried beans and lentils.



Vitamin C rich fruits.



Whole grain foods.



Salmon.