

## How to Increase your Child's Iron Intake

### Why is Iron important?

Iron is needed to help make red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body. It also has a role in brain development, fighting infections and growth. All of the iron needed must be taken in through the diet, as the body cannot make it. Children who do not eat enough iron-containing foods can become tired, pale; have headaches, a lack of concentration and poor appetite.

Low iron (anaemia) can be diagnosed through a blood test and your child may be prescribed an iron medicine in the short term to improve their iron levels. However, it is important to also improve your child's diet, so that when the iron medicine is stopped their levels do not fall again.

### What are the best foods for iron?

- Red meats (beef, lamb, pork)
- Offal meats – liver, liver pate, kidney
- Chicken or turkey – the dark meat contains more iron than the light meat (breast)
- Fish – sardines, pilchards, salmon, mackerel

### Non meat sources

- Eggs (the yolk contains the most iron)
- Iron-fortified breakfast cereals
- Iron-fortified milk
- Wholemeal / wholegrain breads
- Chapattis made with wholemeal flour
- Dried peas, beans (baked beans, chick peas, kidney beans), lentils (dhal)
- Leafy green vegetables – broccoli, cabbage, spinach, peas, kale
- Dried fruit – apricots, figs, raisins, sultanas, dates
- Peanut butter and nuts (whole nuts are not recommended for children under 5 because of choking risk)

### Ways to improve iron absorption from food:

Vitamin C helps iron to be absorbed from foods. A food or drink containing vitamin C can improve the iron absorption from non-animal sources, if eaten at the same meal. Foods rich in vitamin C are:

- Fruit and fruit juice, particularly citrus fruits, kiwi and strawberries.
- Vegetables (including frozen varieties), salad and potatoes.

Bran containing cereals and tea reduce iron being absorbed into the body. This should be avoided at mealtimes and up to 1 hour after eating.

### Meal ideas

#### Breakfast

Ready Brek or porridge with dried fruit  
Fortified breakfast cereal with sliced banana or dried fruit  
Baked beans on wholemeal toast  
Scrambled, boiled or poached egg on wholemeal bread  
Grilled sausage or bacon with wholemeal bread or toast

#### Main Meal

Spaghetti bolognaise  
Chilli con carne and rice  
Lentil or bean dhal with wholemeal chapattis  
Meat stew with vegetables  
Meat or bean and vegetable curry with wholemeal chapattis / rice  
Steak and kidney pie with potatoes and vegetables  
Grilled chops with vegetables and potatoes  
Beef and vegetable stir-fry with noodles  
Corned beef hash with baked beans  
Lasagne with salad  
Poached egg, baked beans and chips

#### Snack meal

Wholemeal bread sandwich filled with meat or peanut butter or egg or liver pate  
Baked beans on wholemeal toast  
Hummus and pitta bread with tomatoes  
Lentil soup with wholemeal toast  
Tin of mackerel / sardines on wholemeal toast  
Omelette with salad  
Jacket potato with baked beans

#### Snacks

Slice of fruit cake or dark ginger cake or malt bread  
Fresh or dried fruit  
Nuts

### Other useful tips

- Do not give cow's milk as the main drink to your child until they are at least 12 months old
- Limit cow's milk intake to 1 pint per day

**For further information please contact the Paediatric Dietitians on 0121 424 1674.**

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