How much iron per day?

| Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI) of Iron (in mg per day) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Infants         |                 |
| 0-6 months      | 0.2 mg*         |
| 7-12 months     | 11 mg           |
| Children        |                 |
| 1-3 years       | 9 mg            |
| 4-8 years       | 10 mg           |
| 9-13 years      | 8 mg            |
| Men             |                 |
| 14-18 years     | 11 mg           |
| 19-70 years     | 8 mg            |
| >70 years       | 8 mg            |
| Women           |                 |
| 14-18 years     | 15 mg           |
| 19-50 years     | 18 mg           |
| 50+ years       | 8 mg            |
| Pregnant        |                 |
| 14-50 years     | 27 mg           |
| Lactating       |                 |
| 14-18 years     | 10 mg           |
| 19-50 years     | 9 mg            |

The above values represent the Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI) values for Australians. Sourced from the Nutrient Reference Values for Australia & New Zealand (2006).

* Adequate Intake (AI) was used for infants (0-6 months), as an RDI was not available for this age group. Also, iron in infant formula is less well absorbed by the body compared to breast milk (bottle fed infants will need 5-10 times this amount).

Vegetarians require 80% more high iron foods to equal iron absorption from meat containing foods.

Example of iron for a day

**BREAKFAST** ........................................................ mg iron
2 wholewheat, fortified breakfast biscuits with 1 cup reduced fat milk. 1 mandarin .......................................... 5.2

**MORNING TEA**
130g can of baked beans on 1 slice of wholemeal bread…. 2.2

**LUNCH**
100g grilled chicken, with spinach garden salad (capsicum, cucumber, tomato, avocado), dressed with fresh lemon juice and olive oil ................................. 8.4

**AFTERNOON TEA**
200g tub of plain yoghurt
6 dried apricot halves and 20 raw almonds ..................... 1.2

**DINNER**
100g cooked lean beef
2 cups of cooked mixed vegetables (broccoli, carrot, capsicum) 1 medium potato, baked ................................. 4.7

Minimum total iron intake ...................... approx 22.4mg
Total energy intake .............................. approx 7092kJ

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Why is iron important?
Iron helps your body carry oxygen in the blood. It gives us energy, helps us concentrate and fights off infection.

Children, teenagers, menstruating women, pregnant women, vegetarians and vegans are the groups most at risk of iron deficiency. Their iron needs are higher than other groups.

There are two types of iron found in food. Haem iron is found in animal foods. Haem iron is the best type of iron as it is well absorbed by the body (about 20% is absorbed). Haem iron is found in meat, poultry, fish and seafood. Generally, the more red or darker the meat is, the higher iron content it has.

Non-haem iron is found in plant foods and is not as well absorbed by the body (only about 5% is absorbed). Non-haem iron is found in cereals, vegetables, legumes and nuts. The actual amount of iron absorbed differs between individuals.

How can I increase my iron?
- Choose foods high in iron at each meal. It is recommended that up to a maximum of 455g of lean, cooked red meat can be consumed per week. If you are vegetarian, high-iron replacement foods will be needed (e.g. beans, lentils, fortified cereals, nuts, vegetables).
- Include fruits or vegetables with each meal. Foods high in vitamin C (e.g. berries, oranges, capsicum, tomato) & vitamin A (e.g. carrots, plant oils, dairy, eggs) increase our absorption of non-haem iron by 2-3 times. Try adding strawberries to your iron-fortified breakfast cereal OR add capsicum and tomato to a spinach and bean salad.
- Avoid drinking tea and coffee with meals. Rather, drink tea & coffee between meals as they contain tannins that can halve iron absorption. Oxalates in spinach and phytates in cereals and legumes can inhibit iron absorption from these foods.

*Please note that iron supplements should not be taken without medical advice.*

### Best sources of iron (in mg)

- **Beef (lean), cooked**
  - 100g = 2.3mg
- **Veal (lean), cooked**
  - 100g = 1.1-1.9mg
- **Lamb (lean), cooked**
  - 100g = 2.0-2.5mg
- **Pork (lean), cooked**
  - 100g = 0.6-1.0mg
- **Chicken (no skin), cooked**
  - 100g = 0.4-0.9mg
- **Kangaroo, cooked**
  - 100g = 4.1mg
- **Tuna, canned in water**
  - 100g = 1.0-1.3mg
- **Salmon, canned or grilled**
  - 100g = 1.1-1.3mg
- **Sardines, canned in water**
  - 100g = 2.3mg
- **Oyster, raw**
  - 6 = 3.5mg
- **Egg, large, 65-70g**
  - 1.0mg
- **Tofu, firm, 100g**
  - 2.3-2.9mg

### Other sources of iron (in mg)

- **Baked beans**
  - small can, 130g = 1.66mg
- **Legumes/pulses/beans, cooked**
  - ½ cup = 2.0-2.5mg
- **Spinach, raw & chopped**
  - 1 cup = 1.2mg
- **Fortified breakfast cereal**
  - 1 cup = 3.0mg
- **Wholemeal bread**
  - 2 slices = 1.1-1.3mg
- **Oyster, raw**
  - 6 = 3.5mg
- **Peanut butter**
  - 2 Tablespoons = 0.6mg
- **Dried apricots, 10 halves**
  - 1.1mg
- **Malt-based drink, dry beverage base**
  - 20g = 5mg

Average iron content of foods sourced from FoodWorks 2009 and NUTTAB 2010