

## **Iron and Your Child's Diet**

### **What is iron?**

Iron is a mineral that helps red blood cells carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Children need iron to grow. Iron deficiency anemia can occur when a child does not eat enough iron. A child with this type of anemia may be tired and get sick more often than normal. It may also keep your child from growing as they should.

### **What are iron-rich foods?**

There are three levels of iron sources:

<b>Super Iron Sources</b> Give your child 1 or more each day*	<b>Good Iron Sources</b> Give 2 to 3 each day	<b>Fair Iron Sources</b> Give 2 to 3 each day	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beef liver</li> <li>• Hamburger</li> <li>• Venison</li> <li>• Turkey</li> <li>• Chicken liver</li> <li>• Pork</li> <li>• Chicken</li> <li>• Tuna, salmon or other fish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cereal bars</li> <li>• Oatmeal</li> <li>• Cereals (fortified with 45% or more of the Daily Value of iron)</li> <li>• Cream of Wheat</li> <li>• Wheat germ</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prunes</li> <li>• Raisins</li> <li>• Tofu</li> <li>• Enriched Bread</li> <li>• Tomatoes</li> <li>• Peanut Butter</li> <li>• Dried beans and peas</li> <li>• Nuts &amp; seeds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turnip greens</li> <li>• Winter squash</li> <li>• Whole wheat bread</li> <li>• Spinach</li> <li>• Sweet potato with skin</li> <li>• Enriched pasta or rice</li> <li>• Broccoli</li> </ul>

\*If your child follows a vegetarian diet, they will have to eat more from the good and fair categories. Follow the tips below to help them absorb as much as iron as possible from these foods.

### **Mealtime tips**

- Do not let your child drink too much milk. It is not a good source of iron. The calcium in milk may make it hard for iron to be absorbed by the body. Serve your child milk at times other than when you serve iron-rich foods.
- Give a 4-ounce glass of orange, cranberry juice or apple juice with added Vitamin C along with iron-fortified cereal or toast in the morning.
- Add foods that are rich in iron to other foods to boost iron content. Try adding wheat germ to hamburger patties or meatloaf; add oatmeal to cookie batter.

### **Vitamin C helps**

Iron is found in many foods. Some of this iron is not easy for your child's body to use. Vitamin C helps the body use iron. To get more iron from non-meat foods, eat "Good" or "Fair" iron source foods with Vitamin C rich foods.

**Sources of Vitamin C:**

- Oranges & Orange juice
- Potatoes
- Broccoli, Spinach & Cabbage
- Strawberries & Blueberries
- Grapefruit & grapefruit juice
- Fortified apple, cranberry or grape juice
- Tomatoes & Tomato juice
- Watermelon & Cantaloupe
- Green Peppers
- Collard greens & Mustard greens

**Good Combinations for Vitamin C and non-meat iron:**

- Fortified cereal and orange juice
- Oatmeal with strawberries on top
- Infant rice cereal with pureed fruit
- Bean tacos with tomatoes
- Spaghetti with tomato sauce
- Spanish rice
- Grilled cheese sandwich & tomato soup
- Pizza
- Stuffed green peppers
- Cereal bars made with fruit
- Macaroni and cheese with broccoli
- Vegetable stir-fry with enriched rice
- Peanut butter toast & vitamin C fortified apple juice

**Reading food labels**

- The “% Daily Value” for iron on a food label says 18 mg. This is the amount for an adult. Use the **Daily Iron Needs for Children** chart below.
- In general, foods that contain 15 to 20% of the total Daily Value of iron are good sources.

**Daily Iron Needs for Children**

Age	Mg Iron Needed Each Day
0 – 6 months	.27 mg
7 – 12 months	11 mg
1 – 3 years	7 mg
4 – 8 years	10 mg
9 – 13 years	8 mg
14 – 18 years (male)	11 mg
14 – 18 years (female)	15 mg

**ALERT:** Call your child’s doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.