

Brakes guide to Iron



What is iron?

Iron is a mineral that is needed to produce haemoglobin, a protein in red blood cells that transports oxygen around the body. Iron also plays a role in maintaining a healthy immune system. Lack of iron in the diet can lead to iron deficiency anaemia, which can make people feel tired, have reduced energy levels and become more susceptible to infections.

How much iron do we need?

How much iron you need depends on your age and sex but the requirements for adults are:

- 8.7mg a day for men over 18
- 14.8mg a day for women aged 19 to 50
- 8.7mg a day for women over 50

Requirements for children vary depending on their age:

- 6.9mg a day for children aged 1-3
- 6.1mg a day for children aged 4-6
- 8.7mg a day for children aged 7-10

Which foods contain iron?

Animal based sources of iron (haem iron) include red meat and liver (avoid liver during pregnancy). Plant based sources of iron (non-haem iron) include beans, peas, lentils, tofu, nuts, seeds, dried figs, dried apricots, dried dates and dark green leafy vegetables like spinach, cabbage, and broccoli. In the UK, all white flour is fortified with iron (plus calcium and some B vitamins) and many breakfast cereals are too.

Animal based sources of iron (haem iron) are absorbed more easily by the body. Vitamin C can increase the absorption of plant based sources of iron (non-haem iron). Fresh fruits especially citrus fruits, orange juice (no more than 150ml), berries, green vegetables, peppers, tomatoes and potatoes are all sources of vitamin C and can be eaten with plant based sources of iron, to increase absorption.



How to include iron with meals



BREAKFAST

- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Wholemeal/wholegrain toast
- Fruit



LUNCH

- Salads sprinkled with seeds
- Beans on wholemeal/wholegrain toast
- Lentil soup
- Dried fruit



DINNER

- Beef with green leafy vegetables
- Tofu stir-fry
- Bean-based chilli or curry



SNACKS

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Vegetable sticks