If you have any queries, please contact your dietitian on:

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The body absorbs iron from the food that we eat.

Iron is needed for making red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body.

If iron levels are low, less oxygen is transported around the body and so the amount of oxygen reaching the organs and tissues is decreased.

This can prevent tissues and organs working properly and puts them at risk of damage. Low iron levels can also lead to tiredness, poor concentration, low energy levels, and reduced appetite.
Increasing iron levels

Children need to ensure they have a good iron intake to support their rapid growth and development.

The easiest and healthiest way to increase the amount of iron in the body is to eat a balanced diet containing lots of iron rich foods every day.

This leaflet has lots of suggestions for iron rich foods and should help make meal planning a little easier.
Iron is found in many foods but the body can most easily absorb the iron found in animal sources. The best iron rich foods are:

- **Red meat**
  (e.g. beef, lamb, pork, ham, venison)

  A general rule is that the darker the meat, the more iron it contains!

- **Dark poultry meat or game**
  (e.g. dark turkey / duck)

- **Offal, black pudding, haggis**

- **Fish** - Sardines or mackerel

- **Liver and liver pate** are excellent sources of iron but should only be eaten by children once a week due to high vitamin A content.

### Lunch ideas

- Baked potato with baked beans
- Lentil & Carrot Soup with a bread roll
- Sandwiches filled with beef/ham/bacon & tomato
- Sardines in tomato sauce on toast
- Beef burger and salad with potato wedges (skins on)

### Main meal ideas

- Beef/lamb casserole with baked potato and green vegetables
- Spaghetti bolognise with peas
- Beef and Broccoli / or vegetable stir fry with nuts and rice
- Cottage pie served with peas and carrots
- Omelette with roasted peppers and boiled new potatoes (skins on)
- Lentil curry and rice with poppadums
Meal suggestions

The following are some ideas for meals that have good amounts of iron. **Remember to include fruit and vegetables with or after all meals to increase iron absorption.**

**Breakfast ideas**

- Iron fortified breakfast cereal with milk
- Baked beans on toast
- Boiled egg and toast fingers / scrambled eggs on toast
- Include a glass of fruit juice / vitamin C enriched cordial / piece of citrus fruit with breakfast to increase iron absorption.

Good non-meat sources of iron

Iron is also found in a number of non-meat foods:

- Pulses e.g. beans (including baked beans), lentils, chick peas
- Green leafy vegetables e.g. broccoli, dark green cabbage (kale), peas
- Dried fruit – apricots, raisins, figs
- Chopped nuts e.g. almonds, brazil nuts
- Egg yolks
- Bread (especially wholemeal), oatcakes, chapatis, poppadums
- Potatoes – especially with the skin on
- Some products are fortified with extra iron such as breakfast cereals and breads – check the labels to see which are fortified.
The iron from non-meat sources is not absorbed as well by the body compared with the iron found in animal sources. **Vitamin C** can help the body to absorb this iron.

It is important to include foods high in vitamin C at each meal.

Aim for a good balance of both iron rich and vitamin C rich foods on the plate, have a piece of fruit after meals, or a glass of orange juice alongside.

Foods high in vitamin C include:

- Fruits and fruit juices e.g. oranges, berries, kiwi
- Potatoes
- Vegetables (e.g. peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, spinach)

Certain hot drinks like tea, coffee and cocoa contain chemicals called polyphenols which can reduce iron absorption. It is therefore best to avoid drinking these at mealtimes or within half an hour of a meal to maximise iron absorption from food.

**Snack suggestions**

The following are suggestions of some snack foods that contain good levels of iron:

- Dried apricots or raisins
- Vegetable sticks with hummus dip
- Slice of malt loaf or fruit cake with a glass of fruit juice
- Digestive or ginger nut biscuit with orange segments, berries, sliced apple