



How to Prevent Iron Deficiency Anaemia?

Iron is the main component of haemoglobin, which is present in red blood cells and is responsible for carrying oxygen to all parts of the body. While it is widely assumed that thin people and vegetarians are more prone to anaemia, this condition may occur as long as there is an inadequate intake of iron. This type of anaemia is called iron deficiency anaemia, which causes pallor and tiredness. It may even affect the physical development of children, weaken our immunity, lower our learning or work efficiency, and lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Picky eaters (including those who go on an extreme diet), persons who lose blood periodically (e.g. women of childbearing age and regular blood donors), vegetarians and children are more likely to suffer from iron deficiency.

The key to preventing iron deficiency anaemia is to have an adequate intake of iron. As recommended by the *Dietary Reference Intakes for China (2023 edition)*, adult females aged 49 or below should consume 18 mg of iron every day. As for menopausal women aged 50 or above and adult males, they are recommended to consume 10 to 12 mg of iron on a daily basis. Meat, fish, eggs and alternatives are the main sources of iron. Some iron-rich foods are as follows:

- meat (e.g. beef and pork);
- seafood (e.g. shrimps, oysters and clams);
- eggs;
- dried beans and soya bean products (e.g. red kidney beans, chickpeas, soya beans and soya bean sticks);
- seeds and nuts (e.g. peanuts, sesame, walnuts and cashews); and
- iron-fortified breakfast cereals.

We should follow the recommendations of the “Healthy Eating Food Pyramid” to attain a balanced diet. Adults should consume 5 to 8 taels of meat, fish, eggs and alternatives every day. In fact, an adequate intake of iron can simply be achieved by having proper food combinations.

In addition, vitamin C helps enhance the absorption of iron from plant-based foods. Pairing iron-rich plant-based foods with good sources of vitamin C can boost iron intake. Some common examples include:

- adding fresh strawberries to iron-fortified breakfast cereals;
- cooking red kidney beans with sweet peppers;
- cooking soya bean sticks with broccoli; and
- adding tomatoes to scrambled eggs.

Eating fruit after a meal is another simple way to increase our iron absorption from plant-based foods.

It is also worth noting that our beverage choices at a meal will affect our iron absorption. Tannins in strong tea and coffee inhibit iron absorption. It is therefore advisable not to consume tea or coffee within one to two hours after a meal. Water or water with lemon are more suitable for consumption during a meal.