



How to Prevent Iron Deficiency Anaemia?

Iron is the main component of haemoglobin, which is present in red blood cells and 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, anaemia may be the result of 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 the body's immunity, lower 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 and regular blood donors), vegetarians and children are more likely to be deficient in iron.

The key to preventing iron deficiency anaemia is to maintain an adequate intake of iron. As recommended by the *Chinese Dietary Reference Intakes* (2013 edition), women aged under 50 should consume not less than 20 mg of iron every day. For male adults and women aged 50 or above, they are recommended to consume 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 soybean products (e.g. red kidney beans, chickpeas, soybeans and tofu sheets);
- Seeds and nuts (e.g. peanuts, sesame, walnuts and cashews); and
- Breakfast cereals fortified with iron.

To attain a balanced diet, we should follow the recommendations of the “Healthy Eating Food Pyramid”. Adults can maintain an adequate intake of iron by consuming 5 to 8 taels of meat, fish, eggs and alternatives every day and choosing the proper food combinations.

Vitamin C enhances the absorption of iron by the body. To boost iron intake, we can pair iron-rich vegetarian foods with good sources of vitamin C. Some common examples include:

- Adding fresh strawberries to breakfast cereals fortified with iron;
- Preparing red kidney beans with sweet peppers;
- Cooking tofu sheets with broccoli ; and
- Making scrambled eggs with tomatoes.

Eating fruit after meals is another simple way to increase our iron intake from plant foods.

It is also worth noting that iron intake is affected by our beverage choices at meals. As strong tea and coffee contain tannins, which inhibit iron absorption by the body, it is advisable to choose water over these beverages when having meals.