

Know More about Iron

Recently, do you feel tired all the time, find it difficult to concentrate or feel unmotivated at work? As an office worker, you may encounter the above situations before and think that you do not have enough rest only. However, it may also represent the symptoms of iron deficiency anemia due to lack of iron in your body.

Functions of Iron

Haemoglobin in red blood cells is responsible for carrying oxygen to all parts of the body. Iron is required to make haemoglobin in our body. If we have inadequate intake of iron, it will cause iron deficiency anaemia. Symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia include pallor, tiredness, dizziness, weakened immunity, difficult to concentrate, decreased work and exercise performances. The risks of low birth weight and preterm labour will be increased if pregnant women lack of iron. In children, the cognition and learning abilities will be affected if they have iron deficiency anaemia. Therefore, an adequate intake of iron is vital.

People at Risk of Getting Iron Deficiency Anaemia

The major reasons for iron deficiency are an inadequate intake or increased loss of iron. The following people are more prone to iron deficiency anaemia:

- Picky eaters (including those who are on a very restricted diet);
- Vegetarians;
- Persons who lose blood periodically (e.g. women and regular blood donors); and
- Pregnant women and children.

Eating Tips for Increase Iron Intake

The key to preventing iron deficiency anaemia is to maintain an adequate intake of iron. According to the recommendations by the Chinese Dietary Reference Intakes (2013 edition), women aged under 50 should consume no less than 20 mg of iron every day, while male adults and women aged 50 or above should consume 12 mg of iron on a daily basis. Meat, fish, eggs and alternatives are the main food sources of iron.

Below are some iron-rich foods:

- Meat (e.g. beef and pork);
- Seafood (e.g. mussels, oysters and clams);
- Eggs;
- Dried beans and soybean products (e.g. red kidney beans, chickpeas, soybeans and beancurd sheets);
- Seeds and nuts (e.g. peanuts, sesame, walnuts and cashews); and
- Breakfast cereals fortified with iron.

Vitamin C Aids in Iron Absorption

Vitamin C enhances iron absorption from plant sources. Therefore, we can eat foods that are rich in vitamin C with iron-rich foods. Examples include:

- Adding fresh fruit (e.g. strawberries) to breakfast cereals fortified with iron;
- Stir-frying chicken with bell peppers and red kidney beans;
- Cooking beancurd sheets with broccoli in soup;
- Making scrambled eggs with tomatoes; and
- Eating fruit after meals.

Strong Tea, Coffee and Milk Inhibit Iron Absorption

Tannins in strong tea and coffee, as well as calcium in milk, inhibit iron absorption by the body. Therefore, it is advisable to choose water over these beverages when having meals.

To ensure an adequate intake of iron, we should follow the recommendations of the “Healthy Eating Food Pyramid”, that is consuming 5 to 8 taels of meat, fish, eggs and alternatives every day for adults, as well as paying attention to food combinations and attaining a balanced diet.

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