

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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Iron Deficiency Anaemia

How your diet can help



Why do we need Iron?

Iron is important for good health and mental and physical wellbeing. Iron is needed to make healthy red blood cells and to transport oxygen around your body.

If you are not getting enough iron daily then you may start feeling:

- Tired
- Lethargic
- Have poor concentration

If you have long term poor iron intake you may become **anaemic** – which means you may also suffer from:

- Chronic tiredness
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness

Groups at Highest Risk

Group	Cause
Women	Heavy periods, pregnancy, dieting, skipping meals
Teenagers	Skipping meals, dieting, rapid growth, not enough iron rich foods, heavy period
Athletes	Dieting, fad diets
Vegetarians	Not enough iron rich foods, poorly absorbed iron from vegetarian iron sources

Types of Iron in Food

HAEM IRON is found in foods from animal flesh

- Red meat – beef, lamb, corned beef, tongue, liver or liver pate*
- Chicken, Pork, Sausages and Seafood (these contain a lot less iron than red meats)

Your body readily absorbs the iron from the above foods, though they do contain varying amounts. It tends to be that the redder the meat the more iron it contains.

NON-HAEM IRON is found in plant foods

- Eggs - cooked
- Pulses (e.g. beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Dark green leafy vegetables (e.g. broccoli, cabbage, spinach)
- Dried fruit – apricots
- Breads and Cereals

The iron from these foods is not absorbed as well by the body. However by eating foods containing haem iron (e.g. red meat) with vegetables, you can increase the absorption of non-haem iron by up to four times.

Having foods containing Vitamin C has a similar effect – drinking a glass of orange juice with your whole grain breakfast cereal, increases iron absorption from the cereal by more than 100%.

*Liver and liver products should be avoided in pregnancy

Vitamin C

Foods containing high amounts of vitamin C are fruit and vegetables and their products. These can help your body absorb iron from your food.

- Fruit – especially citrus fruit and kiwifruit
- Fruit juices
- Vitamin C enriched cordials –Ribena
- Green leafy vegetables
- Salad vegetables – tomato, peppers
- Potatoes

You should aim to have five servings of fruit and vegetables a day.

Try to include a Vitamin C rich food at each meal time

- Fresh, dried or tinned fruit on cereal
- Salad vegetables in sandwiches – cheese and tomato, tuna and salad
- Dessert – fruit salad or banana and custard or tinned fruit with ice cream or yogurt

We recommend not drinking tea or coffee at meal times or within one hour of a meal. These drinks contain tannins, which decrease the amount of non-haem iron absorbed.