



Women and iron. Are we getting enough?

Women need iron more than men but that's hardly surprising as we are the stronger sex aren't we!? However studies are showing us that despite requiring approximately 1½ times the iron requirement of men (Recommended daily allowance 14mg/day versus 10 mg /day) up to a third of women are consuming intakes less than this.

Iron deficiency in women is becoming an increasing problem and low intakes lead to low stores in the liver leading to eventual full-blown anaemia. Iron is needed to produce healthy red blood cells, which carry oxygen around our bodies and hence give us energy. However, if we are lacking in iron this process does not occur efficiently leading to symptoms of fatigue, weakness and poor health

Women are particularly vulnerable to developing iron deficiency because of:

1. Increase requirements due to monthly menstrual loss
2. More inclined to follow restrictive weight reducing diets thus not taking in recommended amounts.
2. Drinking too much tea/coffee, both contain substances that interfere with iron absorption.
3. Intense fitness regimes can cause women to damage red blood cells thus losing iron.

How to increase your iron intake:

Though iron is a very abundant nutrient in foods it is not always easily absorbed. Iron presents in foods in two ways:

1. **Haem Iron** - found mainly in beef, lamb, chicken, pork, oily fish like salmon, tuna mackerel, liver, kidneys. This type of iron is very well absorbed by the body and these foods should be included 5-7 times/week to help boost iron intake. (*please note that pregnant women should avoid liver and other offal products because of the high Vitamin A content*)
2. **Non haem Iron** - found mainly in fortified foods like breakfast cereals, breads, dark green leafy vegetables like broccoli, spinach, cabbage and other foods like peas, beans, lentils, egg yolk and nuts. This type of iron is not very well absorbed at best we absorb approximately 20% of what we eat. Including Vitamin C along with the above foods does help to increase the level of iron absorbed. For example drinking orange, grapefruit, or cranberry juice along with your breakfast cereal. Other ways to help absorption is to add a little meat /chicken or fish to foods containing vegetables or eggs for example add minced beef to a bean chilli dish or a small amount lean ham to an omelette. Also, drink tea or coffee between meals and not with meals.

Here are some examples of Iron rich meals, which also add vitamin C to aid absorption:

- Spinach Salad with strips of sirloin beef.
- Mexican tortillas, refried beans with beef or chicken
- Scrambled eggs with lean ham
- Wholemeal bread with green and tomato salad and pate



- Caesar Salad with smoked chicken strips
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