Are you getting enough iron?

Practical tips to ensure you are getting enough iron
If you lack energy you may be low in iron. Symptoms of iron deficiency are subtle and can be mistaken for a busy lifestyle. If you have any of these symptoms, see your doctor:

- Tiredness (even after rest)
- Lack of energy
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Frequent infections
- Feeling down

Are you low in iron?

Why do you need iron?

Iron is used by the body to carry oxygen in the blood.

**iron**

- **healthy growth & brain development** for babies, toddlers and children to grow and develop normally
- **wellbeing** to produce energy from food
- **immunity** for a healthy immune system
The best way to prevent iron deficiency is to eat iron-rich foods regularly. If you are iron deficient, your doctor may prescribe an iron supplement to help your iron levels return to normal. Most people find that once their iron levels have returned to normal, they no longer require supplements. Eating an iron-rich diet will help to maintain healthy iron levels.
Which foods contain iron?

There are a number of foods that are high in iron, but the iron in these foods isn’t absorbed by the body in the same way.

Iron found in beef, lamb, fish, pork and chicken is well absorbed by the body, whereas iron found in cereals with added iron, tofu, spinach, eggs and legumes is less well absorbed by the body.

The amount of iron you need depends on the type of foods you choose (see graph).

The best sources of iron are beef and lamb as they are high in well absorbed iron. Eating an iron-rich diet which includes 130g of cooked* beef or lamb every second day is recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

- **Beef and lamb contain double the iron in pork, chicken and fish**
- **The redder the meat, the more iron it contains**

*200g raw weight = 130g cooked weight*
3 easy steps to an iron-rich diet

1: Eat iron-rich foods, including beef and lamb 3 to 4 times a week to meet iron and zinc needs

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Foods high in iron are also high in zinc, important for growth, development and immunity.

2: When having a meal without beef, lamb, pork, chicken or fish, add a vitamin C-rich food. This will increase the amount of iron absorbed from the meal

iron-rich plant foods + 5 strawberries or half orange or medium tomato or 3 broccoli florets = increased iron absorption

3: If you drink tea, coffee or cola, have them between meals as they decrease the amount of iron absorbed from the meal
Iron-rich meal ideas

**breakfast**
- Wheat bran flake cereal (30g), reduced fat milk (½ cup) and mixed berries (150g)
  - Total iron: 5.72mg
  - Absorbable iron: 0.57mg
- Baked beans (½ cup), wholemeal toast (2 pieces) and a kiwifruit
  - Total iron: 4.19mg
  - Absorbable iron: 0.42mg

**lunch**
- Asian beef (100g cooked) salad
  - Total iron: 6.0mg
  - Absorbable iron: 0.9mg
- Roast lamb (100g cooked) and salad wrap
  - Total iron: 6.11mg
  - Absorbable iron: 1.07mg

**dinner**
- Wholemeal spaghetti bolognaise (200g raw mince/serve)
  - Total iron: 8.61mg
  - Absorbable iron: 1.56mg
- Lentil burger pattie (1 cup canned lentils/serve) with tomato (1) on a wholemeal bun
  - Total iron: 7.52mg
  - Absorbable iron: 0.75mg

Add a vitamin C-rich food to meals without meat to increase the amount of iron absorbed from the meal.
Poached eggs (2 eggs), wholemeal toast (2 pieces), cooked tomato (½ whole), cooked spinach (½ cup) and orange juice (½ cup)

- Total iron: 6.25mg
- Absorbable iron: 0.63mg

Canned tuna (90g) and veggie pasta salad

- Total iron: 4.32mg
- Absorbable iron: 0.67mg

Lamb casserole (200g raw lamb/serve) with sweet potato

- Total iron: 7.02mg
- Absorbable iron: 1.26mg
Beef san choy bow

**ingredients**
- 500g lean beef mince
- 2 tbsp canola oil
- 200g mushrooms, sliced
- 2 carrots, cut into matchsticks
- 200g snow peas, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tsp ginger, grated
- 2 tbsp oyster sauce
- 2 tbsp salt-reduced soy sauce
- 8 iceberg lettuce cups, sliced spring onions, sliced deseeded long red chilli (optional) and coriander leaves, to serve

**method**
1. Heat a large wok over high heat. Add 2 tsp of the oil and half of the beef and cook, stirring for 4-5 minutes or until browned and excess liquid has evaporated. Transfer the cooked beef to a bowl and repeat with 2 tsp of the oil and the remaining beef. Remove from wok.
2. Add 2 tsp of the oil and the mushrooms to the wok and stir fry for 2 minutes. Remove from wok.
3. Add the remaining 2 tsp of oil, carrots and snow peas to the wok and stir fry for 1 minute. Add the ginger and garlic and stir fry for a further minute. Add the cooked beef, mushrooms, oyster sauce and soy sauce and cook for another minute, stirring well to combine.
4. Serve in iceberg lettuce cups, topped with sliced spring onions, sliced deseeded chilli and coriander leaves.

**ALTERNATIVE:** Add other vegetables to the san choy bow depending on what you have in the fridge e.g. capsicum, green beans.

**serves** 4
**prep time:** 15 mins  
**cook time:** 15 mins
Beef salad with watermelon, cucumber & mint

ingredients
4 x 200g beef rump steaks, trimmed of fat
100g (½ cup) brown rice
3 cloves garlic
4 long red chillies (optional), seeded, roughly chopped
1 tbsp fish sauce
4 tbsp lime juice
1 cup loosely packed coriander
2 tbsp brown sugar
2 tbsp olive oil
1 kg seedless watermelon, rind removed, cut into small wedges
1 cucumber, sliced
2 green onions, sliced
1 cup loosely packed mint
80g Asian salad mix

method
1. Take beef out of the fridge to bring it to room temperature.
2. Cook rice in a small saucepan of boiling water for 25 minutes or until cooked. Drain and evenly spread over a large plate and refrigerate until cooled completely.
3. To make dressing, process garlic, chillies, fish sauce, lime juice, coriander and sugar in a food processor until finely chopped and combined.
4. Brush beef steaks with oil and cook on high on a barbecue or chargrill plan until cooked to your liking. Remove from heat, cover with foil and allow to rest for 10 minutes before slicing. Transfer sliced beef to a small bowl, add one-third of the dressing and toss well to combine.
5. Place watermelon, cucumber, green onions, mint, Asian salad mix and rice and the remaining dressing in a large bowl and toss well to combine.

ALTERNATIVE: Asian salad mix is available from supermarkets. If you like, substitute with your favourite lettuce combination.
Beef casserole with red wine

ingredients
800g chuck steak, trimmed of fat and diced
2 tbsp plain flour
2 tbsp olive oil
1 brown onion, sliced
2 carrots, cut into large pieces
200g mushrooms, quartered
1 cup red wine*
2 cups salt-reduced beef stock
2 zucchini, cut into large pieces
Mashed potato, lemon zest and chopped parsley to serve

*Red wine can be replaced with 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar & 1 cup water

method
1. Place beef in a bowl and toss in flour. Preheat oven to 170°C
2. Add 2 tsp of oil to a large casserole dish over high heat, add half the beef and cook until browned on both sides. Remove from casserole dish and repeat process with 2 tsp oil and remaining beef. Set aside.
3. Add the remaining oil and the onion, carrot and mushrooms to the casserole dish. Cook, stirring for 3 minutes or until lightly coloured. Add the red wine, beef stock and beef to the dish and bring to the boil.
4. Cover and cook in the oven for 2 hours or until the meat is tender. Add the zucchini for the final 20 minutes of cooking time.
5. Serve with mashed potato, lemon zest and parsley.

ALTERNATIVE: Make shepherds pie by placing leftover casserole into an ovenproof dish and topping with sweet potato or potato mash. Cook until potato has browned and filling is piping hot.
Dukkah spiced lamb with rocket & feta salad

ingredients
800g lamb leg steaks, trimmed of fat
1½ tbsp olive oil
4 tbsp dukkah
150g rocket leaves
1 avocado, sliced
75g reduced fat feta cheese, crumbled
Juice of half a lemon
Roasted sweet potato and pumpkin, to serve

method
1. Brush the lamb with 2 tsp of the oil and cook on high on a barbecue or chargrill pan until cooked to your liking. Remove from the heat, cover with foil and allow to rest for 10 minutes.
2. Toss rested lamb steaks in dukkah ensuring an even coating on both sides.
3. Place the rocket, avocado, feta, and remaining oil in a large bowl and toss to combine. Add lemon juice to taste.
4. Serve the lamb steaks with the rocket and feta salad and roasted sweet potato and pumpkin.

ALTERNATIVE: Substitute dukkah for a spice mix. Dukkah is an Egyptian nut based spice blend. You can find it in delis or the spice section of bigger supermarkets.
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