

IRON DEFICIENCY AND IRON SUPPLEMENTS IN PREGNANCY

What Happens with Low Iron?

Iron is essential for making hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to other cells and your baby. Iron also helps you maintain a healthy immune system. During pregnancy, your iron requirements increase considerably. Because your blood volume expands, you need more iron to make more hemoglobin. You also need extra iron for your growing baby.

Blood tests in the first and third trimester reveal your hemoglobin levels. It is normal for your hemoglobin to drop a little as your pregnancy progresses. If your levels are too low, you may feel tired because your oxygen levels are reduced. Your care provider will suggest ways to increase your hemoglobin so you can continue to have a healthy pregnancy. Low hemoglobin at the time of your baby's birth can make your recovery difficult with even average blood loss.

If your hemoglobin levels are especially low, your care provider may also check your ferritin levels. Ferritin levels let your care provider know how much iron your body has stored and your ability to replenish your hemoglobin. If both your hemoglobin and your ferritin are low, nutritional and supplemental therapy is important.

Food Sources of Iron

<i>Food source</i>	<i>Iron amount</i>
1/3 cup oysters or clams	6.0 mg
1 cup Cream of Wheat cereal*	4.5 mg
90 grams tofu	3.5 mg
1 tablespoon blackstrap molasses*	3.5 mg
Ovaltine beverage (one 25 gram serving)	3.5 mg
3.5 ounces beef	2.5 mg
Baked potato with skin on	2.8 mg
½ cup cooked legumes (dried beans or lentils)	2.3 mg
½ cup lima beans	2.2 mg
1 tablespoon pumpkin seeds	2.3 mg
¼ cup wheat germ	2.6 mg
2 slices enriched bread	2.0 mg
10 dried prunes	2.0 mg
1 banana or avocado	2.0 mg
½ cup leafy dark green vegetables	1.2 mg
3 ounces chicken or fish	1.0 mg
½ cup tomato juice	1.4 mg
1 egg	1.0 mg
½ cup beets	1.0 mg

**Mix dried prunes into Cream of Wheat and sweeten with molasses for an iron-rich breakfast!*

The best way to boost your iron intake is to combine a diet rich in iron with iron supplements.

Pregnant people need 18 mg in 2nd trimester and 23 mg in the 3rd trimester

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Iron Supplements:

There are three kinds of iron you can buy in the pharmacy: ferrous fumarate, ferrous sulfate, and ferrous gluconate; different amounts of iron are absorbed from each:

- Ferrous fumarate: you absorb 33% - in a 100 mg tablet you absorb 33 mg of iron
- Ferrous sulfate: you absorb 20% - in a 100 mg tablet you absorb 20 mg of iron
- Ferrous gluconate: you absorb 12% of the iron – in a 100 mg tablet you absorb 12 mg of iron

If your care provider recommends that you supplement your diet with iron, here are some good options:

- Ferrous fumarate: one 50 mg tablet two times a day (available at any pharmacy, the most inexpensive option)
- Floradix: an easily absorbed liquid form of ferrous gluconate (87 mg/dose) in a plant base (available at some pharmacies, most health food stores, somewhat expensive)
- Palifer: higher dose of ferrous fumarate with folic acid and vitamin C for absorption (available at the pharmacy, more expensive) Hemoplex: higher dose of ferrous fumarate in a highly absorbable mineral base (at health food stores, most expensive).

If you have extended insurance, your care provider can prescribe some iron supplements; talk to your care provider about this option. Be sure to drink lots of water while you are taking supplemental iron as iron pills can be very constipating.

Homeopathic Iron: If you use homeopathic medicines, Ferrum Phos is one remedy for low iron.

Herbs for Iron: If you use herbs for your health, the following herbs may help boost your iron intake. If you are making herb tea, you should make teas with 1 tsp. herb per cup of hot water. Steep covered 5 - 10 minutes for leaf or flowers. Drink 2 - 4 cups per day. If you are unsure about the use of herbs during pregnancy, consult a naturopath in your community.

- Nettle leaf, alfalfa, and dandelion herb teas
- Red raspberry leaf herb tea
- Kelp and other sea weeds
- Wheatgrass juice (this one is useful for vegetarians)

Boosting Iron Absorption: Try these tips to get the most out of your iron!

- Vitamin C enhances iron absorption. Take supplements with a glass of orange juice; combine foods, such as mixing greens with nuts and citrus for a terrific salad!
- Calcium inhibits iron absorption, so avoid milk or calcium supplements when you take your iron or eat iron rich foods.
- Continue your folic acid supplements!
- Try cooking your foods in cast iron pots and pans. In particular, tomato-based stews or sauces (acid helps release the iron) cooked in a Dutch oven or cast iron pan are a great source of iron.