

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS, PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND CARERS

Increasing your iron intake

You have been found to have anaemia. This leaflet will help you identify foods that are naturally high in iron, and if eaten may help correct your anaemia.

What is iron?

Iron is a mineral in many foods. It is needed by the body to help make healthy blood, which can carry the oxygen we breathe in around our body.

If there is not enough iron in the body you may look pale, feel tired, be irritable and you may get out of breath easily. This is described as 'iron deficiency anaemia'.

If you/your child has iron deficiency anaemia, you/he/she needs to eat more foods containing iron. Often you/they cannot get all the iron the body needs from food alone so the doctor will generally prescribe iron medicine or tablets.

If you/your child has difficulty taking the iron medicine, please discuss an appropriate alternative with the doctor or pharmacist. Iron medication may cause constipation and turn poo dark, or even black in colour, so don't be alarmed.

There are two types of iron in the diet; one found in animal foods and the other is in plant foods. The iron in animal foods is more easily absorbed.

If your child is under two years, there may be an advantage from using follow-on formula milk instead of cow's milk, as this is fortified with iron.

Which foods are a good source of iron?

Animal foods include:

- Offal (liver, kidney, black pudding, bacon, tongue, pâté)
- Red meats (beef, lamb, pork, beef burger, sausage)
- Oily fish (pilchards, sardines, fish paste)
- Eggs.

Plant foods include:

- Dried fruit (raisins, apricots, prunes, sultanas)
- Green leafy vegetables (spinach, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts)
- Pulses (lentils, kidney beans, baked beans, nuts, hummous, dahl)
- Fortified breakfast cereals and breads.

Other sources:

- Meat extracts (Bovril, Oxo)
- Yeast extract (Marmite)
- Curry and chilli powder
- Liquorice.

How to get the most iron from in your diet

The body can absorb more iron from foods when they are eaten with foods containing Vitamin C.

Therefore the aim is to have some food or drink which is high in Vitamin C in the same meal as iron containing foods.

Good sources of Vitamin C are:

- Fruits (especially oranges, grapefruit and their juices)
- Berry fruits (strawberries, raspberries, blackberries)
- Vegetables (especially potatoes).

There are also substances which can limit the absorption of iron from foods, namely tannins found in tea and coffee. Tea and coffee are stimulant drinks, so it is best not to encourage young children to drink these. They will benefit more from drinking milk or limited amounts of pure fruit juice.

If a child drinks excessively, this can reduce their food intake and contribute to a low iron intake. Take care your child is not filling up with fluids, especially before meals, and is not drinking in excess of one pint of milk daily.

Ideal meals:

- Lamb hotpot
- Beef curry lamb curry
- Corned beef hash
- Liver casserole
- Pork casserole
- Lasagne, made with minced beef
- Spaghetti bolognese, made with minced beef
- Sardines, pilchards, sprats, whitebait
- Chilli con carne
- Steak and kidney
- Lamb chops
- Beef burgers
- Beef stir-fry.

All meals are best served with potatoes, rice, spaghetti or other pasta, plus a salad or lightly boiled vegetables.

Vegetarian options:

- Mixed bean casserole with tinned tomatoes
- Lentil loaf, green vegetables and jacket potatoes
- Vegetable and tomato sauce with spaghetti
- Vegetable curry with brown rice and an orange to follow
- Soya meat substitute shepherd's pie with lightly cooked vegetables
- Vegetable casserole with sesame seeds
- Dahl with rice or chapatti and salad
- Spinach and potato curry with rice
- Vegetable stir-fry with tofu and brown rice.

If you require further support please ask your GP to refer to a dietician.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you need this information in a different language or format, please contact the PET (as above).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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