

Boosting Iron in a Child's Diet

Children need iron to grow and learn. Iron is used to make hemoglobin in the body. Hemoglobin carries oxygen to cells in the body. Cells use oxygen to produce the energy that children need.

The most common reason for a child to be low in iron is because they do not eat enough foods with iron. Symptoms of low iron levels are:

- Poor appetite
- Weight loss or poor weight gain
- Cranky
- Feeling very tired
- Pale skin
- Short attention span

A child who does not eat enough iron rich foods may be at risk for anemia, or low levels of iron. This can make it harder for them to grow and develop.

Food Sources of Iron

Iron is found in both animal and plant foods. Include sources of iron every day in your child's diet. Food, not supplements, is the best way for your child to get the iron they need.

There are two types of iron, heme and non-heme. Foods such as meat, poultry and fish have heme iron. Non-heme iron is found in vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and eggs. Enriched cereals and pastas also contain non-heme iron. Heme iron is better absorbed than non-heme iron.



Children's Iron Needs

Age	Amount of iron (mg per day)
1-3 years	7
4-6 years	10

Children and Iron Supplements

A child who is healthy and eating a variety of foods everyday does not need an iron supplement. It is possible to get too much iron. If your child is not eating foods with iron, talk to your doctor.

Ways to boost iron in your child's meals and snacks:

- Include foods high in vitamin C. Vitamin C helps the body absorb non-heme iron.

Good sources of vitamin C include:

- Kiwi
 - Oranges
 - Grapefruits
 - Berries
 - Lychee
 - Honeydew melon
 - Prunes
 - Mango
 - Cabbage
 - Green or red peppers
 - Broccoli
 - Brussels sprouts
 - Green peas
 - Tomatoes
- Serve sources of heme iron with non-heme foods e.g. spaghetti and meat sauce. Heme iron helps the body absorb non-heme iron.
 - Limit milk to no more than 3 cups (750 mL) per day and fruit juice to ½ - ¾ cups (125 mL – 175 mL) per day. Children who fill up on milk or juice have less room for iron rich foods.
 - Add molasses to muffins, baked beans or other recipes.
 - Sprinkle wheat germ on cereal or add it to baked goods.
 - Use beans, peas and lentils. Add them to casseroles, salads or pasta dishes. Puree them if needed.
 - Add dried fruit like raisins or apricots to cereals and baked goods.
 - Serve enriched or whole grain breads, cereals and pasta.
 - Use an iron skillet for cooking.
 - Replace all but ½ cup (125 mL) of flour with infant cereal in muffin, loaves and cookie recipes. For example, if the recipe calls for 1 ½ cups (475 mL) use 1 cup (250 mL) dry infant cereal and ½ cup (125 mL) flour. See recipes on the right.

Some Iron Boosting Recipes

Infant Cereal Cookies

Makes about 24 cookies.

½ cup (125 mL)	brown sugar
¼ cup (60 mL)	margarine
1	egg
½ tsp (2 mL)	vanilla
¼ cup (60 mL)	all-purpose flour
½ tsp (2 mL)	baking powder
½ tsp (2 mL)	salt
2 cups (500 mL)	infant cereal, dry

1. Preheat oven to 375° F. Grease a cookie sheet.
2. Put margarine in a large bowl. Add sugar and beat until light and fluffy.
3. Add egg and vanilla and mix well.
4. In a separate bowl mix flour, baking powder, salt and infant cereal.
5. Add dry ingredients to the margarine mixture. Mix well.
6. Using a teaspoon, drop the cookie dough onto the baking sheet about 2 inches (5 cm) apart.
7. Bake 10-12 minutes or until lightly browned. Lift baked cookies off the baking sheet and cool on a rack.

Cream of Wheat® Muffins

Makes 12 muffins.

2	eggs
½ cup (125 mL)	oil
1 cup (250 mL)	milk
1 tsp (5 mL)	vanilla
¾ cup (175 mL)	all purpose flour
½ cup (125 mL)	infant cereal, dry
½ cup (125 mL)	white sugar
1 tbs (15 mL)	baking powder
½ tsp (2 mL)	salt
¾ cup (175 mL)	Cream of Wheat®, dry
	Jam (for topping)

1. In a large bowl, combine flour, Cream of Wheat®, infant cereal, sugar, baking powder and salt.
2. In a small bowl, combine eggs, oil, milk and vanilla.
3. Add egg mixture to flour mixture and blend until just mixed.
4. Fill greased muffin tins ¾ full. Top each muffin with one teaspoon (5 mL) jam.
5. Bake at 400°F for 20 minutes or until toothpick inserted comes out clean.



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Durham Health Connection Line
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