
Plant-Based Sources of Iron

Iron is a component of red blood cells. It helps to bring oxygen around the body. It is important for many body functions. Iron deficiency can cause weakness, fatigue, pale skin, and shortness of breath. Vegetarians are at higher risk of iron deficiency. This is because it is more difficult to absorb iron from plants than animals. If you eat a plant-based diet, you should pay attention to eating enough iron.

Iron Requirements, per day:

	Non-Vegetarian	Vegetarian
Men	8 mg	14.4 mg
Women, > 50 years	8 mg	14.4 mg
Women, 19-50 years	18 mg	32.4 mg

Some people have even higher iron needs. This includes menstruating, pregnant, or lactating people, athletes, and people with chronic diseases. Ask your doctor or dietitian for personalized recommendations.

Iron in Plant-Based Foods:

	Food	Amount of Iron
Fruits and Vegetables	1/2 cup spinach, boiled	3.2 mg
	1 cup prune juice	2.9 mg
	1/4 cup black olives	2.1 mg
	1/4 cup tomato paste	2 mg
	1/4 cup raisins	0.7 mg
Whole Grains	1/2 cup oatmeal, cooked	1 mg
	1/2 cup white rice, cooked	1.4 mg
	1/2 cup quinoa, cooked	1.5 mg
	1/2 cup whole grain enriched breakfast cereal	8 mg
Legumes	1/2 cup beans, cooked	2.0 mg
	1/2 cup lentils, cooked	3.3 mg
	3 oz tempeh, cooked	1.5 mg

	1/4 cup hummus	0.8 mg
Nuts and Seeds	1/4 cup nuts	1.3 mg
	2 Tablespoons sesame seeds	2 mg
Other Foods	2 Tablespoons blackstrap molasses	3.8 mg
	1-ounce dark chocolate	3.4 mg

Foods that decrease or enhance iron absorption

Separate these foods and nutrients from sources of iron:

- Coffee and tea
- Calcium, including calcium supplements

Eat these foods with sources of iron for best absorption:

- Oranges
- Strawberries
- Bell peppers
- Broccoli
- Green leafy vegetables

How to Increase Iron in Your Diet:

- Eat iron-rich foods at every meal or snack.
- Eat a variety of iron-rich foods
- Combine iron-rich foods with vitamin C-rich foods.
- Avoid drinking coffee, tea, and milk (including non-dairy milk) with iron-rich foods.
- Use cast iron pans

Sample Iron-Rich Menu:

	Food Item	Iron Content
Breakfast	1/2 cup oatmeal, cooked with water	1 mg
	1/2 cup strawberries, sliced	*Improves iron absorption
	1/4 cup almonds, sliced	1.3 mg
	1 Tablespoons molasses	3.8 mg
	1 cup prune juice	2.9 mg

Lunch	1/2 cup quinoa, cooked	1.5 mg
	3 oz tempeh, cooked	1.5 mg
	1/2 cup broccoli, roasted	*Improves iron absorption
Snack	1/4 cup pistachios	1.2 mg
	1/4 cup raisins	0.7 mg
	1/2 cup whole grain enriched flake cereal	8 mg
	1-ounce dark chocolate	3.4 mg
Dinner	1/2 cup white rice, cooked	1.4 mg
	1/2 cup black beans, cooked	2 mg
	1/4 cup orange bell pepper, chopped	*Improves iron absorption
		Daily total = 28.7 mg