

# Iron

Iron deficiency is the most common nutrient deficiency in the world<sup>1</sup>. The good news is that you can get all the iron you need from a vegan diet because there are lots of plant foods containing good amounts of this mineral.

## Why it's important

Our bodies use iron to make haemoglobin in red blood cells, which carry oxygen in our blood. Iron is also used to make myoglobin, which can store oxygen in our muscle cells. Iron is part of many important enzymes, which are substances that speed up reactions. If your body is running low on iron, you may become tired and anaemic.

## Recommended intakes

In the UK, the following daily intakes of iron are recommended<sup>2</sup>:

Age Group*	Recommended daily intake (mg)	
0-3 months	1.7	
4-6 months	4.3	
7-12 months	7.8	
1-3 years	6.9	
4-6 years	6.1	
7-10 years	8.7	
11-18 years	Non-menstruating 11.3	Menstruating 14.8
Adults	Non-menstruating 8.7	Menstruating 14.8

\*Please note that this resource is aimed at adults. Resources for pregnancy, breastfeeding and children are available at [vegansociety.com](https://vegansociety.com)

## Sources of iron

Good plant sources of iron include lentils, chickpeas, beans, tofu, cashew nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, kale, dried apricots, dried

figs, raisins, quinoa and fortified breakfast cereal. The table on the next page shows you the iron contents of some of these foods.

Amount of iron-rich food	Amount of iron <sup>3,4</sup> (mg)
30g pumpkin seeds	3.0
100g uncooked firm calcium-set tofu	2.7
30g hulled hemp seeds	2.4
30g chia seeds	2.3
150g cooked quinoa	2.2
80g cooked red lentils	1.9
30g cashew nuts	1.9
30g ground linseed	1.7
80g reheated canned kidney beans	1.6
80g cooked kale	1.6
30g dried figs	1.3
30g dried apricots	1.2
80g reheated canned chickpeas	1.2
30g dried raisins	1.1

## Iron absorption

There are lots of factors that affect the amount of iron that your body absorbs from your diet. The most important factor is your body's need for iron: more is absorbed when you are short of iron and less is absorbed when your stores are full<sup>5</sup>. Tea, coffee and some substances in plant foods may make it difficult for your body to absorb iron. On the other hand, vitamin C increases iron absorption, and vegans tend to consume a lot of foods rich in this nutrient. Good sources of vitamin C include pepper, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kiwi fruits, oranges, strawberries, pineapple, grapefruit and orange juice.

## Summary

- Good sources of iron include lentils, chickpeas, beans, tofu, cashew nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, kale, dried apricots, dried figs, raisins, quinoa and fortified breakfast cereal
- Ensure that your daily diet contains plenty of iron-rich foods
- If you are eating a food rich in iron, add a good source of vitamin C to help your body absorb the iron, such as pepper, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kiwi fruits, oranges, strawberries, pineapple, grapefruit or orange juice
- Avoid drinking tea or coffee with meals

## References

1. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (2016) *Micronutrient deficiencies* available from: <http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/ida/en/> (viewed 04-AUG-2016)
2. COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY (1991) *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*, London: HMSO
3. PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND (2015) *Composition of foods integrated dataset (CoFID)* available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/composition-of-foods-integrated-dataset-cofid> (viewed 26-SEP-2016)
4. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (2016) *Food Composition Databases* available from: <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/> (viewed 26-SEP-2016)
5. SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION (2010) *Iron and Health* available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/339309/SACN\\_Iron\\_and\\_Health\\_Report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/339309/SACN_Iron_and_Health_Report.pdf) (viewed 04-AUG-2016)

