

Getting Enough Iron During Pregnancy

It is important to eat foods containing iron for a healthy pregnancy. Iron is important for healthy blood during pregnancy. Iron provides oxygen to your baby and helps them grow. Your baby will also store iron to use for growth and development after delivery until they are 6 months old.

During pregnancy, your body needs to get more iron from food each day (16mg). Most women in Ireland do not meet their daily iron needs for pregnancy. Low blood iron levels can be a problem for many women, especially in the last trimester. This is a condition called anaemia and can cause you to feel tired and short of breath.

To prevent anaemia:

- Eat a well-balanced diet, with several portions of iron rich foods every day throughout pregnancy.
- Consider taking a daily pregnancy multivitamin containing at least 16mg of iron.

Where do I get Iron from?

There are two types of iron in the food you eat:

- **Haem iron** is more easily absorbed. It is found in animal products such as meat, chicken and fish.
- **Non-haem iron**, is less well absorbed. It is found in eggs, green vegetables, pulses and fortified food.

Eating foods high in Vitamin C alongside foods containing non-haem iron improves absorption. Foods high in Vitamin C include citrus fruit, fruit juice, peppers, tomato, and broccoli.

You should avoid eating foods containing tannins (found in tea and coffee) at mealtimes as they can reduce iron absorption from food and supplements.

How do I know if I have anaemia?

Your full blood count should be checked at booking and again at 28 weeks.

The table below shows what level of haemoglobin (Hb) indicates anaemia. Ask your midwife or doctor what your results were.

| | Indicates anaemia | My results |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| At booking | Haemoglobin (Hb) level below 110g/dl | |
| In second or third trimester | Haemoglobin (Hb) level below 105g/dl | |

How do I treat anaemia?

If you have anaemia, your doctor or midwife will advise you to take a high-dose iron supplement (Galfer or Ferrograd-C). This is in addition to taking your daily pregnancy multivitamin.

How can I increase my iron intake from food?

Include foods that have a high iron content in your diet. Remember, haem-iron foods are better absorbed by your body than non-haem iron foods.

Haem iron (well absorbed)

| Food | Portion | Iron |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Animal and fish based sources | | |
| Black pudding | 60g (2 medium slices) | 7.1mg |
| Lean red meat: beef (mince, steak, stew), lamb, pork. | 120g | 2.4-2.8mg |
| Tinned sardines | ½ a small can 70g | 1.6mg |
| Prawns | ¾ cup (120g) | 1.2mg |
| Poultry meat eg. chicken or turkey | 1 medium fillet (120g) | 0.8mg |
| Tuna (tinned in spring water) | 1 small can (70g) | 0.7mg |
| Mackerel | 1 small fillet (50g) | 0.5mg |
| Salmon or tinned salmon | 1 darne or small tin (100g) | 0.4 – 0.5mg |
| Cod | 1 small fillet (120g) | 0.2mg |

Non-haem iron (less well absorbed – eat with a source of vitamin C)

| Food | Portion | Iron |
|---|------------------------|-----------|
| Beans, peas, legumes | | |
| Soya beans (boiled) | 1 cup (170g) | 5mg |
| Lentils (boiled) | 1 cup (200g) | 4.3mg |
| Kidney beans (canned), Butter beans, Chickpeas | 1 cup (180g) | 3.3-4.1mg |
| Falafel | 4 pieces (100g) | 3.4mg |
| 1 small can baked beans | ½ tin (200g) | 2.7mg |
| Tofu | 60g | 0.7mg |
| Hummus | 1 tablespoon | 0.6mg |
| Peas | 1 tablespoon | 0.5mg |
| Cereals and grains | | |
| Fortified breakfast cereal (e.g. Special K, Bran Flakes, Multigrain hoops, Rice Krispies or Puffed rice, Corn flakes, Shredded wheat, All bran, Weetabix, Ready Brek) | 1 cup (30g) | 2.4-4.8mg |
| Oatmeal/ Porridge oats | 40g (2 scoops) | 1.5mg |
| Brown rice | 1.5 cups (150g cooked) | 1mg |
| Wholemeal bread | 1 slice | 0.9mg |
| Poultry | | |
| Eggs | 2 | 2mg |
| Nuts, nut products, seeds | | |
| Sesame seeds | 1 tablespoon (19g) | 2mg |
| Cashew nuts | 1 handful (25g) | 1.6mg |
| Hazelnuts, brazil nuts, almonds, peanuts | 1 handful (25g) | 0.6-0.8mg |
| Tahini paste | 1 heaped tsp (6g) | 0.6mg |
| Peanut butter | 1 tablespoon (20g) | 0.4mg |
| Fruit and Vegetables | | |
| Kale/spinach (boiled) | 1 cup (100g) | 1.7mg |
| Dried Figs | 2 small (30g) | 1.1mg |
| Broccoli | 85g (2 spears) | 0.9mg |
| Fig rolls | 2 | 0.8mg |
| Dried fruit (raisins, apricots, sultanas, prunes) | ¼ cup (25g) | 0.6mg |

High iron containing meals and snacks

Breakfast

- 2 eggs and 2 slices wholemeal bread with spinach and tomato
- Bowl of multigrain cheerio's with milk and glass of orange juice
- Bran flakes with dried fruit, almonds, milk and handful of berries

Lunch

- Wholemeal pitta bread with 3-4 falafel, hummus and salad
- Chicken salad sandwich on wholemeal brown bread
- 1 small tin baked beans on wholemeal toast with grated cheese
- 1 medium size baked potato with beans/chicken and salad
- Mixed leaf salad with seeds or nuts or dried fruit and a portion of pulses or meat or fish with grains, for examples quinoa or couscous

Dinner

- Chili con carne (made with minced beef) with brown rice and vegetables
- Chicken noodle stir fry with broccoli
- Red lentil dahl curry with brown rice and side salad

Snacks

- Cashew nuts and raisins
- 2 mandarins and dried apricots
- 2 fig rolls and handful berries
- Brazil nuts and cherry tomatoes
- 3-4 wholegrain crackers or oatcakes with hummus, cucumbers and peppers

| | Sample Meal Plan | Estimated iron content |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Breakfast | 2 eggs and 2 slices wholemeal bread with ½ cup spinach and tomato* 150ml orange juice* | 4.1mg |
| Snack | 2 mandarins* and 3 dried apricots | 0.9mg |
| Lunch | 1 medium size baked potato (with skin on) with 1 small tin baked beans, handful low fat cheese, and handful mixed salad leaves 125g greek yoghurt, raspberries* and 2 tsp pumpkin seeds | 4.9mg |
| Snack | 25g cashew nuts and 1 tbsp raisins | 1.8mg |
| Dinner | Chili con carne (made with lean minced beef 140g) , 1 tablespoon kidney beans, tinned tomatoes* , peppers* , 1 tablespoon garden peas with 150g brown rice Glass of milk | 4.2mg |
| Snack | 2 fig rolls and handful berries* | 0.8mg |
| *Source of vitamin C | | Total iron 16.7mg |