

Iron Deficiency Anemia

Iron is important to the human body because it is the main constituent of hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of blood. Iron deficiency can be caused by excess blood loss (heavy periods), certain diseases, chronic illness, and nutritional deficiencies. Pregnancy is also a common time to have low iron because of increased demands on the mother's blood. It is important to maintain a normal level of iron for a pregnant mom to help with the developmental requirements of the baby, as well as to cope with postpartum blood loss.

Iron Rich Foods:

- Red meat, chicken, salmon, liver (6 oz. has a whole day's supply)
- Eggs with yolks
- Dried beans (kidney and lima), peas, lentils, soybeans, chick peas
- Dark green leafy vegetables (spinach, collard greens, kale, Swiss chard - sauté with some olive oil, garlic and salt)
- Peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pistachios, roasted almonds / cashews
- Sweet potatoes
- Dried fruit (figs, prunes, apricots), prune juice (will help with constipation too)
- Blackstrap molasses
- Herbal teas: nettle, alfalfa, parsley, dandelion, or pregnancy tea

Iron Supplements:

The CDC recommends supplementing iron in pregnancy if hemoglobin is below 11.0 in the 1st and 3rd trimesters and below 10.5 in the 2nd trimester. Your doctor or midwife may recommend one of several different types of iron supplements:

- Ferrous gluconate or ferrous sulfate - can be taken 1-3 times per day.
- Chelated iron or iron citrate - 1 tablet 3 times per day
- Yellow dock - 2 capsules 2 times per day
- Iron tincture (nettles, yellow dock, dandelion) - 1 dropper-full 3 times per day
- Floradix - 1-2 tablespoons 2-3 times per day
- Alfalfa tablets - 2-3 tablets, 2-3 times per day
- Blood Builder - 2-3 times per day

Tips to increase absorption of iron:

1. Take iron supplements between meals or 30 minutes before meals. If this is too difficult to remember, take with meals.
2. Avoid calcium ingestion with iron (milk, Tums, calcium supplements). Take iron supplement at opposite time that you take your prenatal vitamin.
3. Take with vitamin C (orange juice, Emergen-C drink, or vitamin C supplement).
4. Cook with a cast iron pan.

Sometimes, women experience constipation from the iron supplements. Drinking plenty of water and having a high-fiber diet can help.