

## Facts About Iron Supplements

When blood testing indicates that serum ferritin is low (below 60), an oral iron supplement may be prescribed. A low serum ferritin is often associated with hair loss; hair will not regrow when the ferritin is low.

Iron supplements are available in many forms. The cheapest and most readily available is over-the-counter **ferrous sulfate**. It comes in **325 mg tablets**. Recommended dose is **three tablets per day, one after each meal**. Usually a three-month course is recommended first with follow-up blood testing at that point to be sure the serum ferritin is improving. Taking iron for a longer time may be necessary, even indefinitely in some people. Once the ferritin has increased to over 60, hair may begin to regrow and Rogaine can then be helpful as well.

**Increasing iron in the diet is also helpful.** Foods high in iron include red meat, especially liver, fortified breakfast cereals and whole grains. Taking iron with vitamin C is important because it helps the body absorb the iron. Foods high in vitamin C include citrus fruits and orange juice (avoid calcium fortified orange juice when taking iron), broccoli, tomatoes, sweet red and green peppers, peaches, papaya, strawberries and cantaloupe. Do not take iron supplements together with calcium supplements as the calcium will block the absorption of iron.

**Elemental iron** is the amount of iron in a supplement that is available for absorption. In the ferrous sulfate 325 mg tablet, there are 65 mg of elemental iron.

If the supplement you have lists only the elemental iron, take the number of tablets you need to equal 50 mg per dose and space the dosage over your three meals for the day. Be sure to drink plenty of water with the iron, as well as through the day. Eight cups a day is recommended.

**Side-effects of taking iron supplements** include stomachache, constipation, diarrhea and cramps, as well as dark stools. Taking the iron with a full stomach helps reduce irritation; adding fiber and bulk to the diet (such as prunes or prune juice) can also help reduce the side-effects.

**Prescription iron preparations** are available. The cost is much higher than the generic ferrous sulfate but is recommended in some cases. Insurance may or may not cover the cost for prescription iron supplements.

## Iron Rich Foods for Iron Deficiency Anemia

For iron deficiency anemia in women, a diet with iron rich foods along with iron supplements is often recommended. Absorption of iron from food is influenced by multiple factors. One important factor is the form of the iron. Heme iron, found in animal sources, is highly available for absorption. Non-heme iron on the other hand, found in vegetable sources, is less available. Iron rich foods of an iron rich diet are listed below.

### Iron Rich Foods containing Heme Iron

#### Excellent Sources

Clams  
Pork liver  
Oysters  
Chicken liver  
Mussels  
Beef liver

#### Good Sources

Beef  
Shrimp  
Sardines  
Turkey

### Iron Rich Foods containing non-Heme Iron

#### Excellent Sources

Enriched breakfast cereals  
Cooked beans & lentils  
Pumpkin seeds  
Blackstrap molasses

#### Good Sources

Canned beans  
Baked potato with skin  
Enriched pasta  
Canned asparagus

**Warning: Pregnant women should not eat liver because of its very high Vitamin A content. Large amounts of Vitamin A can be harmful to the baby.**

The absorption of non-heme iron can be improved when a source of heme iron is consumed in the same meal. In addition, the iron absorption-enhancing foods can also increase the absorption of non-heme iron. While some food items can enhance iron absorption, some can inhibit or interfere with iron absorption. Avoid eating them with the iron-rich foods to maximize iron absorption.

### Iron Absorption Enhancers

Meat/fish/poultry  
Fruits: Orange, orange juice, cantaloupe,  
Strawberries, grapefruit, etc.  
Vegetables: Broccoli, brussel sprouts,  
tomato, tomato juice, potato,  
red & green peppers  
White wine

### Iron Absorption Inhibitors

Red wine, coffee & tea  
Vegetables: **Spinach**, chard, beet  
greens, rhubarb & sweet potato  
Whole grains & bran  
Soy products

Iron	mg
<b>Iron in Breads, cereals, and grains</b>	
Bran flakes, 1 cup	11.0
Oatmeal, 1 packet	6.3
Pasta, 1 cup, cooked	1.7
Semolina, Cream of wheat, 1/2 cup cooked	5.5
Wheat germ, 2 tablespoons	1.2
Whole wheat bread, 1 slice	0.9
<b>Iron in Vegetables (1/2 cup cooked)</b>	
Sea vegetables	18-42
Swiss chard	2
Turnip greens	1.6
Sweet potatoes, canned	1.7
Turnip greens	1.6
Pumpkin, cooked	1.7
Potato, baked with skin	1.7
Turnip greens	1.6
Prune juice, 4 oz	1.5
Spinach, cooked	1.5
Beet greens, cooked	1.4
Potato, 1 large	1.4
Peas, cooked	0.65
Green beans, cooked	0.60
Broccoli, cooked	0.55
<b>Iron in Legumes (1/2 cup cooked)</b>	
Lentils	3.2
Black-eyed beans	2.6
Navy beans	2.5
Pinto beans	2.2
Lima beans	2.2
Kidney beans	1.5
Chick peas (200 g)	6.2
<b>Iron in Soy foods (1/2 cup cooked)</b>	
Tofu	6.6
Soybeans	4.4
Tempeh	1.8
<b>Iron in Nuts/Seeds (2 Tablespoon)</b>	
Pumpkin seeds	2.5
Figs, dried, 5	2.0
Dried apricot, 5	1.6
Almond, 1/4 cup	1.3
Tahini	1.2
Sesame	1.2
Sunflower seeds	1.2

<b>(Heme Iron Sources) (100 g)</b>	
Clams, steamed	22
Clams, cooked	8.5
Oysters, cooked	8.5
Oysters, raw	5.4
Chicken liver, cooked	8.5
Beef liver, cooked	6.3
Beef, roasted	3.5
Ground beef, cooked	2.2
Lamb beef, cooked	2.2
Turkey, white meat	1.6