

Significant Food Sources of Iron

Iron is an essential mineral, necessary for the formation of hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in the blood, and myoglobin, which carries oxygen in muscle. It is also part of several enzymes involved in cellular energy production. Iron deficiency is one of the most common nutritional deficiencies.

Iron absorption varies depending on the body's need for it, the form in which it is found in food, and a variety of other factors. There are two forms of dietary iron: heme and non-heme. Animal products such as liver, red meat, poultry, fish (especially oysters and clams), and eggs contain heme iron, the form known to be better absorbed. Sources of non-heme iron, which is not absorbed as well as heme iron, include like peas, beans, nuts, dried fruits, leafy green vegetables, and fortified breads or cereals. Plant foods contain only non-heme iron. However, vegetarians do not have a higher incidence of iron deficiency anemia than do meat eaters.

To enhance absorption of iron, vitamin C may be consumed concurrently. Many vegetables, such as broccoli and bok choy, are high in both iron and vitamin C, so the iron in these foods is well absorbed. Cooking in a cast iron skillet will increase iron content of food, particularly when the food is high in vitamin C.

The RDA for iron is 10 mg a day for adult men, and 18 mg a day for adult women. Inadequate iron intake can lead to anemia and other health problems. Excessive iron intake can be also very dangerous: if the levels of iron in the blood are too high, iron begins to build up in the tissues. This can cause serious health problems including heart disease and increased risk of liver cancer. Many multivitamins and dietary supplements contain iron, so use of these products should be monitored to avoid excessive iron accumulation.

	Amount	Milligrams
Seafood		
Clams	3 oz (9 large)	23.76
Oysters	3 oz (12 medium)	11.39
Shrimp	3 oz (15 large)	2.62
Trout	3 oz	2.07
Land animals		
Pork liver (organic only)	3 oz	15.40
Chicken liver (organic only)	3 oz	7.27
Venison	3 oz	3.90
Steak	3 oz	2.60
Ground beef	3 oz	2.36
Chicken breast	3 oz	1.49
Turkey (light meat)	3 oz	1.20
Beans / Peas		
Lentils	½ cup	3.30
Kidney beans	½ cup	2.60
Garbanzo beans	½ cup	2.35
Navy beans	½ cup	2.25
Lima beans	½ cup	2.25
Pinto beans	½ cup	2.20
Black eyed peas	½ cup	2.15
Black beans	½ cup	1.80
Soybeans (roasted)	½ cup	1.70

	Amount	Milligrams
Tofu, firm	4 oz	1.30
Green split peas	½ cup	1.25
Grains		
Buckwheat	½ cup	1.35
Wheat germ	2 Tbsp	1.28
Vegetables (cooked)		
Swiss chard	1 cup	4.00
Dandelion green (raw)	1 cup	1.89
Brussels sprouts	1 cup	1.86
Bok choy	1 cup	1.76
Green beans	1 cup	1.60
Potato (with skin, baked)	1 medium	1.60
Spinach	1 cup	1.00
Mustard greens (boiled)	1 cup	1.00
Fruits		
Pears (dried)	2 halves	1.50
Figs (dried)	3 whole	1.20
Prunes	6 halves	1.20
Peaches (dried)	2 halves	1.05
Miscellaneous		
Spirulina, dried	1 oz	8.08
Molasses (blackstrap)	1 Tbsp	3.50
Kelp	1 cup, cooked	2.28
Pumpkin seeds	½ oz	2.12
Baking chocolate, unsweetened	1 oz	1.90
Basil	1 Tbsp	1.89
Sauerkraut	½ cup	1.73
Dill weed	1 Tbsp	1.50
Black olives	10	1.49
Brewer's yeast	1 Tbsp	1.38