Therapy
Professionals Ltd
Physio, Speech Language, Music,
Occupational Therapists & Dietitians

Iron Awareness Week 1-7 May

What's the big deal about Dietary Iron?

Dietary iron is needed for the production of haemoglobin, which carries oxygen around our body. It is also needed for our immune system to work well. We all need to eat iron regularly as red blood cells are replaced continuously and require iron. Those with the greatest requirements are:

- Babies, children and teenagers as they are growing rapidly.
- Girls and women who have periods, due to loss of blood each month.
- Pregnant women who need enough iron for themselves and their baby, especially at the end of pregnancy when growth is greatest.
- Athletes, particularly endurance runners.

Where do we get iron from?

There are two types of iron in food.

- Haem iron - found in meat, chicken and fish, which is easily absorbed.
- Non-haem iron - found in plant foods, such as vegetables, cereals , beans and lentils, which is not absorbed as easily

How can I get enough iron?

For meat eaters

- Lean red meats are the best source of easily-absorbed iron, followed by chicken, poultry, pork and fish. Eat a variety of these 3-4 times a week.
- Eat meat, chicken or fish and vegetables together to help increase iron absorption.

For vegetarians:

- To increase iron absorption, aim to eat a Vitamin C rich food such as kiwifruit, citrus fruit, orange juice, peppers, broccoli etc. at the same time as an iron-containing meal
- Try to include foods rich in non-haem iron such as tofu and tempeh, iron-fortified breakfast cereals, cooked beans and lentils, green leafy vegetables.

NB – The tannins in tea and coffee reduce the amount of iron your body can absorb. Drink tea or coffee in between meals, or wait at least ½ - 1 hour after eating.

Iron blood levels

Low iron levels are relatively common, and lead to paleness, tiredness, lethargy, poor concentration and decreased resistance to infection. Low blood iron levels can be due to:

- Poor dietary iron intake
- An increased need for iron, e.g. during pregnancy
- Iron being lost in the gut through conditions such as peptic ulcers, tumours or ulcerative colitis.

If you have heavy periods, are tired, weak, light-headed or look pale, talk to your doctor about checking your blood iron levels.

If your blood levels are low, discuss with your Doctor or Dietitian ways you can increase your iron levels through diet and if necessary the use of iron supplements. Iron supplements should only be taken under medical supervision, as unsupervised use of iron supplements can reduce absorption of other essential nutrients, such as zinc and calcium.

Here at Therapy Professionals Ltd our friendly Dietitian is able to give you advice on increasing your dietary iron level.

For more information and advice contact us at Therapy Professionals

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