

IRON FOR ATHLETES

WHAT IS IRON?



Iron is involved in red blood cell production, and it's essential for cognitive function, heart health and immunity.

There are two types of iron:

- Heme iron is found in animal foods and up to 40% is absorbed by the body.
- Non-heme iron is found in plant foods and up to 20% is absorbed.

WHO NEEDS IT?

Everyone needs iron, but some need it more than others:



- **Athletes.** Because of losses due to sweat, muscle damage, oxygen demand and hormonal shifts during exercise, athletes' iron needs are 1.3-1.7 times higher than average.
- **Females.** Iron is lost during menstruation, so females also have higher iron needs.
- **Vegetarians.** Vegetarians need 1.8 times more iron than the average person.
- **Adolescents.** Growing bodies need more iron!

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOUR BODY IS LOW IN IRON?

Iron-deficiency may cause some or all of the following symptoms:



Noticeable decrease in performance

Extreme fatigue

Pale skin

Rapid heart rate

Headaches and dizziness

Muscle weakness

Shortness of breath, especially with exercise

Cravings for non-food items such as dirt, clay, paper or ice chips

Consult your physician if you're experiencing any of the above.

Optimal iron status ensures your body can handle the demands of training, school and life. The best way to keep your iron levels in top shape is to build an IRONCLAD diet. See the back of this handout to find out how.

MAKE YOUR DIET IRONCLAD!

What to know:

- **Heme iron** is absorbed better than non-heme iron.
- **Vitamin C** helps the body absorb iron when eaten together. Think of ways to combine vitamin C-rich foods with iron foods (examples below).
- **Calcium** and **tannins** (found in coffee and tea) can inhibit iron absorption. With vitamin C's help, this can be counterbalanced, but it's best to consume larger amounts of calcium and tannins away from key mealtimes.

IRON-RICH FOODS



Beef

Eggs

Chicken

Tuna

Beans

Dried fruit

Shrimp

Quinoa

Cashews

Lentils

Fortified cereal

Instant oatmeal



VITAMIN C-RICH FOODS



Oranges

Bell peppers

Tomatoes

Broccoli

100% juice

Spinach

Cabbage

Leafy greens

Berries

Kiwi

Cantaloupe

Potato/sweet potato



IRONCLAD COMBOS

- Oatmeal with nuts, seeds and dried fruit
- Beef fajitas with peppers and onions
- Omelet with broccoli, spinach, peppers and cheese
- Chicken parmesan with red sauce over pasta and a side of steamed broccoli
- Spinach salad with tuna, tomato and almonds
- Chili topped with avocado and whole grain bread
- Whole grain cereal with milk and 8 oz 100% orange juice
- Lentil soup made with vegetables and quinoa
- Lean beef burger on whole wheat bun topped with lettuce and tomato plus fruit salad



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