



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Getting Enough Iron During Pregnancy



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Getting Enough Iron During Pregnancy

Why is it important to get enough iron?

- Iron helps your blood carry oxygen through your body.
- When your iron levels are too low, you can develop a condition called **iron deficiency anemia**. This can lead to serious health issues, like:
 - › Weakness
 - › Fatigue (tiredness)
 - › Trouble concentrating
 - › Lowered immune function (you are more likely to get an infection)
- **A person who is pregnant needs more iron to support the growth of their baby.** During pregnancy, you need about one third ($\frac{1}{3}$) more iron.

- Getting enough iron is as important as taking a prenatal multivitamin. It helps to:
 - › Make sure your baby is born with enough iron
 - › Make sure your baby is born at a healthy weight
 - › Keep you feeling well during and after your pregnancy

How much iron do I need each day?

Pregnant	27 mg
Breastfeeding or chestfeeding, 18 years old or younger	10 mg
Breastfeeding or chestfeeding, 19 years old or older	9 mg

How can I make sure I get enough iron?

- While you are pregnant, try to choose foods that are high in iron.
- Your body absorbs (takes in) **heme iron** (iron from meat and seafood) better than **non-heme iron** (iron from plants and eggs). If you do not eat meat or seafood, you may need 2 times more iron than people who eat meat and seafood.
- **Your body will absorb more iron from plant foods when you eat them with meat, fish, or poultry** (like chicken, turkey). Try:
 - › Eating pasta with meat sauce
 - › Adding nuts to a chicken stir-fry
 - › Adding pulses (beans, peas, or lentils) to soups, stews, salads, casseroles, burritos, fajitas, or spaghetti sauce

- **Your body will absorb more iron from foods when you eat them with foods that have vitamin C.**

Best sources of vitamin C:

- › **Fruits:** citrus fruits (like oranges and grapefruits) and their juices
- › **Vegetables:** red and green peppers, kiwis

Good sources of vitamin C:

- › **Fruits:** strawberries, cantaloupes
- › **Vegetables:** broccoli, potatoes (with the skin on), tomatoes

- **Cooking with cast-iron cookware can increase the amount of non-heme iron in foods.**
- **Some foods can lower how much iron your body absorbs. These include:**
 - › Foods that are high in calcium, including dairy and fortified milk alternatives (like soy and rice drinks)
 - › Coffee and tea

Do not eat or drink these at the same time as eating foods with iron or taking an iron supplement.

How will I know if I am getting enough iron?

- During pregnancy, your health care provider will check your iron levels (hemoglobin and ferritin) through regular blood tests. If your iron levels are low, they may tell you to take an iron supplement.

- Your hemoglobin is: _____
 - › Normal is 110 or higher.
- Your ferritin is: _____
 - › Normal is 30 or higher.
- Take _____ mg (milligrams) of **elemental iron**:
 - › Every 2 days
 - › On an empty stomach (1 hour before **or** 2 hours after eating)
 - › With vitamin C (like orange or grapefruit juice)

Do not have milk products or acid-lowering medications for 1 hour after.
- We may ask you to check your iron levels again 4 to 6 weeks after you start or increase an iron supplement.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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