

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Preventing Anemia

Iron is a mineral needed for growth and development and found in every cell of the body. Your body uses iron to make hemoglobin which carries oxygen to all parts of your body. When the body does not receive enough iron, it can lead to iron deficiency anemia, a condition that is caused by not having enough healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen to the body's tissue (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

Iron is important for the neurologic development of infants and children. Children starting preschool will usually have a physical exam that includes blood work as part of a wellness check before entering school. Physical exams are important because it gives the physician an opportunity to determine if the child is growing and developing properly. The blood work performed will check the child's iron level. If iron levels are not in the expected range, the doctor may have the parent(s) talk to a dietitian to get information on how to provide more foods that are high in iron. If needed, an iron supplement may be prescribed by the pediatrician along with a follow-up. Children in your care that have low iron stores may feel tired, dizzy, or develop headaches frequently. Their skin and fingernails may also become pale.



Examples of Iron-Rich Foods

To make sure children are getting iron from the foods that you serve them, try offering foods from the following list at least three times per week.

Be sure to check your nutrition labels to determine if foods you are serving are high or good sources of iron.

Foods that are “High” in Iron: To be “high” in iron, a food item must contain 3.6 mg or more iron per reference amount (20% of the Daily Value per reference amount) qualify to carry the label “high in iron.”

Foods that are a “Good” Source of Iron: Foods that contain 1.8 mg to less than 3.6 mg iron per reference amount (10-19% of the Daily Value per reference amount) qualify to carry the label “good source of iron.”

Iron from Animal Sources	Iron from Non-Animal Sources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean beef • Chicken • Turkey • Chicken liver • Beef liver • Turkey leg • Tuna • Eggs • Leg of lamb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach • Beans and lentils • Tofu • Baked potatoes • Fortified breakfast cereals • Whole grain and enriched breads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cashews • Raisin bran (enriched) • Instant oatmeal • Beans (kidney, lima, navy) • Lentils • Spinach • Whole wheat bread • Brown rice

The foods from animal sources contain iron that is easily absorbed. However, when you serve food sources of iron from a plant source, you should include a good source of vitamin C in the meal because it will help the body to absorb the iron.

Good Sources of Vitamin C	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orange juice • Citrus fruits • Kiwi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strawberries • Bell peppers



Mealtime Memo

Monthly Food Activity

Consider having a taste test to encourage the children to try new, healthy foods. This month you could feature a food item that is iron-rich. Have each child create a notecard that includes their name, the name of the food, and then color in either a smiley face (if they like the food) or a frowning face (if they do not like the food). Use this illustration as an example. You could even display the cards on a special *Foods of the Month* board.

If your budget or the availability of food options does not support this kind of activity, you could cut out pictures of the food items to show the children. Then, instead of tasting the food, they could use a smiley or frowning face to indicate if they wanted to try the food.

Childs Name: _____

Food Name: _____



References

- American Society of Hematology (2019). *Iron – deficiency anemia*. Retrieved from <https://www.hematology.org/Patients/Anemia/Iron-Deficiency.aspx>
- Eat Right. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (2016, December). *Foods to fight iron deficiency*.
<https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/preventing-illness/iron-deficiency>
- Fruits & Veggies More Matters (2019). *Eat more! Fill half your plate with fruits & veggies*. Retrieved from <https://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/top-10-reasons-to-eat-more-fruits-and-vegetables>
- Fruits & Veggies More Matter (2019). *Iron in fruits & vegetables*. Retrieved from <https://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/iron-in-fruits-and-vegetables>
- KidsHealth (2016). *About anemia*. Retrieved from <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/anemia.html?ref=search>
- Mayo Clinic. (2019). *Anemia*. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20351360>
- NIH National Institutes of Health. (2018, December). *Iron Fact Sheet for Health Professionals. Iron*. Retrieved from <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional/>
- NIH National Institutes of Health. (2016, February). *Iron Fact Sheet for Consumers. What is iron and what does it do?* Retrieved from <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-Consumer/>
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2009, May). *WIC Nutrition Program. How my son became iron man*. https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/NJ/Iron.pdf

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the Institute of Child Nutrition at the University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Employer.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights; Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2019, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by the University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The University cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images.

