

# TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR

# IRON INTAKE



Do you ever?

- Feel tired or lethargic
- Seem irritable or grumpy
- Suffer frequent infections
- Feel the cold
- Tire easily when exercising
- Have difficulty concentrating

It may surprise you these common symptoms are often caused by iron deficiency; easily avoided by eating more iron-rich foods.

Thousands of New Zealanders aren't getting enough iron – are you one of them?

Follow these simple steps to make sure you're getting enough.

## 1. CHOOSE FROM THE FOUR MAIN FOOD GROUPS

A sure way to improve your iron intake is to eat a balanced and healthy diet, this will also ensure you get dietary iron from a range of foods. Each day you should eat a variety of foods from the four main food groups: fruit and vegetables; grain foods; milk and milk products; and lean red meat, legumes, nuts, seeds, fish, seafood, eggs and poultry.

## 2. EAT LEAN MEAT FOR TOP IRON INTAKE

There are two types of iron in food: haem iron (found in meat, poultry and seafood) and non-haem iron (found mainly in plant foods). Meat also contains non-haem iron. The body absorbs the haem iron in meat much more efficiently than the non-haem iron in plant foods. For example 1 cup of cooked silverbeet contains 0.4mg of iron, but the body can only use between 5-12% of this. In comparison, 120g of cooked lean beef contains on average 3.5mg of iron and the body absorbs 15-25% of it.

## 3. SEE RED

Red meats are richer in haem iron than white meat (e.g. poultry and fish), so eat red meat for a top iron intake. Include a moderate portion of lean red meat about 3 times per week, which equates to up to 500g cooked red meat per week. Enjoy alongside wholegrains and plenty of vegetables as part of a healthy and balanced diet for optimal iron intake.

## 4. GET PLENTY OF VITAMIN C

Vitamin C helps the body to use non-haem iron – the iron in plant foods. Include plenty of vitamin C rich fruit or vegetables with your meals.

## 5. EAT RED MEAT AND VEGETABLES TOGETHER

Eat a combination of red meat and plant foods (e.g. vegetables, pasta, rice, legumes and fruits). Eating meat with plant foods will also help the body use more of the non-haem iron by up to four times. Examples of iron-rich meals include meat and vegetable stir-fry, a meat sauce with pasta and vegetables, or a lean beef salad sandwich.

## 6. KEEP YOUR MEALS TANNIN FREE

It is best to drink tea and coffee between meals, rather than with your main meals. The tannins in tea and coffee reduces the amount of iron we can absorb from food.

## 7. BEWARE OF DIETING

Studies show girls and women on low calorie diets struggle to get their daily iron requirements. Remember, lean beef and lamb are relatively low in calories yet high in iron and can be included in any weight reducing diet, particularly as the protein content keeps you full for longer.

## 8. EXTRA IRON FOR EXERCISE

You need extra iron if you exercise strenuously and often. Have your iron levels checked regularly and ensure your diet is balanced, varied and includes lots of foods high in haem iron. Iron-rich foods include beef, lamb, kidneys and liver\*.

## 9. BE EXTRA IRON SMART IF YOU'RE AT RISK

Infants, girls and women who have periods, teenagers, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, sports people, vegetarians and the elderly are most at risk of being iron deficient. Learn how to cook appealing, iron-rich dishes to suit you and your family. Look for ideas on quick and easy beef and lamb dishes.

## 10. DON'T RELY ON SUPPLEMENTS

The iron in pills or supplements and fortified foods such as breakfast cereal, is poorly absorbed. Don't rely on these for your total daily iron needs, and only use supplements if advised by your doctor.

*\* Whilst pregnant, limit liver intake to 100g/week.*

### HOW CAN I ABSORB MORE IRON?

Red meat can help to increase iron absorption, boosting the use of non-haem iron by up to four times. Vitamin C has a similar effect. Eating a combination of foods high in both haem and non-haem iron (e.g. a beef and vegetable stir-fry), will ensure an iron-rich diet.

Not all iron is created equal, for example, eating just 120g of lean rump beef steak provides the same amount of absorbable iron as 19 cups of cooked silverbeet.

120g of beef or around 19 cups of cooked silverbeet provides a quarter of a woman's daily absorbable iron needs.

**YOUR BODY CAN USE ABOUT 15-25% OF THE IRON IN RED MEAT, BUT ONLY ABOUT 5-12% OF THE IRON IN SILVERBEET.**



**120G LEAN BEEF STEAK**



**19 CUPS COOKED SILVERBEET**

# BEEF + LAMB

## NEW ZEALAND

Other resources: *Thousands of New Zealanders Don't Get Enough Iron, Fuelled by Iron and Iron in Pregnancy*

For a free copy of these resources, please contact:  
0800 733 466 | [enquiries@beeflambnz.co.nz](mailto:enquiries@beeflambnz.co.nz) | [beeflambnz.co.nz](http://beeflambnz.co.nz)

For more information and great iron-rich recipes and meal ideas, visit [recipes.co.nz](http://recipes.co.nz)

**Health problems, including iron deficiency, may result from an inadequate diet. They may also have a medical basis unrelated to diet. The information on this sheet is only general and is not to be taken as a substitute for medical advice in relation to specific symptoms or health concerns.**

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