

# How To Get Your IRON

## From A Plant-based Diet



### EARTHSAVE CANADA

Helping people choose foods that benefit our health, the environment, and the lives of animals.



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## GOOD TO KNOW

The Recommended Daily Intake for iron is 10 mg from heme-iron, 18 mg from non-heme iron.

The Daily Value for iron, used in nutrition labeling, is based on a recommended daily value of 14 mg.

### Taking a supplement 'just in case' is usually not a good idea.

If you take too much iron, you put yourself at risk for heart and liver damage. If you think you need a supplement, consult your health care provider.

### Symptoms of iron deficiency may be vague

Feeling fatigued and not able to exercise as you once did are the most common signs of iron insufficiency anemia. Other fairly common signs may include: headache, dizziness, irritability, difficulty maintaining body temperature, a red-inflamed tongue, and sometimes a rapid or irregular heartbeat.

## RECOMMENDED DAILY AMOUNTS

Pre-menopausal women: 32 mg (based on 18 mg heme iron recommendation)

Post-menopausal women: 15 mg (8 mg)

Pregnant women: 49 mg (27 mg)

Girls, 14 to 18 years old: 27 mg (15 mg)

Boys, 14 to 18 years old: 17 mg (11 mg)

Men: 15 mg (8 mg)

Children 7 months of age to 1 year of age: 17 mg (11 mg)

1 to 3 years of age: 13 mg (7 mg)

4 to 8 years of age: 18 mg (10 mg)

9 to 13 years of age: 15 mg (8 mg)

Infants are born with about a 6 month supply of iron and need much less, easily met by breast milk or infant formula.

All of us should keep our daily intake below 80 mg of non-heme iron (45 mg for heme iron), a very easy thing to do!

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### Meatless Monday

Veg-curious? Not ready to go all the way? Join the global movement and pledge to go meatless one day a week.

[meatlessmonday.ca](http://meatlessmonday.ca)



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**EARTHSAVE CANADA**  
170 - 422 Richards Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z4  
[office@earthsave.ca](mailto:office@earthsave.ca)

## Iron Content of Common Foods

(in milligrams)

Food Source (C = cup)	Iron (mg)
Black beans (100g)	8.7
Oatmeal, instant, cooked (¾ C)	4.5-6.6
Chickpeas, cooked (100g)	6.2
Cream of wheat, all types, cooked (¾ C)	5.7-5.8
Lentils, cooked (¾ C)	4.9
Fortified cereal, all types (30g)	4-4.3
Kidney beans, cooked (¾ C)	3.9
Blackstrap molasses (1 Tbsp)	3.6
Spinach, cooked (½ C)	2-3.4
Tahini (30mg)	2.7
Granola bar, oat, fruit & nut (32g)	1.2-2.7
Tomato puree (½ C)	2.4
Cracker, soda (6 crackers)	1.5-2.3
Edamame, cooked (½ C)	1.9-2.4
Lima beans, cooked (½ C)	2.2
Asparagus, raw (6 spears)	2.1
Tofu (175g)	2
Potato, with skin, cooked (1 medium)	1.3-1.9
Snow peas, cooked (½ C)	1.7
Turnip/beet greens, cooked (½ C)	1.5-1.7
Apricots, dried (¼ C)	1.6
Beets, canned (½ C)	1.6
Kale, cooked (½ C)	1.3
Green peas, cooked (½ C)	1.3

**Check your labels. This is not an extensive list, lots of other foods have iron in them, too!**

## WHY WE NEED IRON

We need iron, mostly, to make the hemoglobin that carries oxygen in our blood.

There are two types of dietary iron, heme and non-heme. On a plant-based diet only non-heme iron is available. Since non-heme iron is not as easily absorbed, Health Canada recommends that we eat 1.8 times as much of that type of iron. The numbers in the chart are based on a diet containing only non-heme iron.

If we don't get enough iron, we develop iron-deficiency anemia. When we have this anemia, our cells can't get enough oxygen, so we feel fatigue, low energy and may have trouble concentrating. This kind of anemia is one of the most common health problems we have in North America. It is most common in menstruating and pregnant women.



### MIX IT UP!

You will absorb more iron if you combine it with a source of vitamin C. Good sources of vitamin C include: broccoli, kale, sweet peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, citrus fruits, and strawberries.

Vitamin C interacts in our stomachs with non-heme iron, keeping the iron soluble so that we can absorb it.

References, recipes, and more at [earthsav.ca](http://earthsav.ca) and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine - [pcrm.org](http://pcrm.org)

## AVOID TOO MUCH IRON!

Make sure you get enough iron, but not too much. Ingesting too much iron leads to iron toxicity. When the body's iron stores are full, the excess iron is deposited in our organs, especially heart and liver, damaging them.



### IMPORTANT FACTS

You can usually get enough iron from your diet, just the same, it helps a lot to include vitamin C-rich foods in your meals. See the note under our 'Mix It Up!' section for some suggestions. A mixed bean salad with lemon vinaigrette or a stir-fry with broccoli and tofu are two tasty, easy suggestions.

Still, lots of women - especially pregnant women - have difficulty getting enough iron.

During pregnancy, your body needs more iron and it may be hard to meet your higher needs from your diet alone. Your health care provider will likely recommend that you take an iron supplement, as well as a prenatal vitamin supplement.

