



## WELLNESS CENTER

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## LOW IRON

Iron is a major component of hemoglobin, a red blood cell protein that carries oxygen to all parts of the body. Iron is vital for many body functions. It is necessary for muscle metabolism, healthy connective tissue, physical growth, cellular function, synthesis of hormones, regulation of enzymatic systems, and neural development.

Iron deficiency can be caused by blood loss, a lack of iron in the diet, inability to absorb iron due to intestinal disorders, or pregnancy. When people have depleted their stores of iron, they are said to be “iron deficient.” Iron deficiency can also be caused by other nutrient deficiencies; deficiencies of copper, riboflavin, vitamin E, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin B12, folic acid, thiamine, and pyridoxine can also cause low iron. Symptoms of iron deficiency may include extreme fatigue, weakness, pale skin, chest pain, headaches, cold hands/feet, brittle nails, poor appetite, and cravings for non-food items like ice, dirt, or starch. If you are experiencing these symptoms, please contact a medical provider to get iron levels assessed. It is possible to increase iron levels through the diet, however, in some cases you may also be recommended a supplement. Do not self-diagnose iron deficiency, as taking excess iron can be harmful.

There are 2 forms of dietary iron: heme and nonheme. Plants and fortified foods contain nonheme iron while meat, seafood, and poultry contain heme iron. The daily recommended intake for females ages 17-18 years old is 15 mg/day and for ages 19-50 is 18 mg/day. For males ages 17-18 the daily recommended intake is 11 mg/day and for 19-60 year olds is 8 mg/day. Young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women require even higher levels of dietary iron. If you are following a vegetarian or vegan diet, try to consume 1.8 times the daily recommended amount. The requirements are higher for vegetarians/vegans since nonheme iron (from plants) is less bioavailable than heme iron (from animals).

### Sources of Iron

Food	Serving size	Amount of Iron (mg)
Dry, Fortified cereal	1 cup	16
Oysters, cooked w moist heat	3 oz	8
White beans, canned	1 cup	8
Dark chocolate (45-69% cacao)	3 oz	7
Lentils, cooked	1 cup	6
Spinach, cooked	1 cup	6
Tofu, firm	½ cup	3
Beef, braised bottom round	3 oz	2
Eggs, hard boiled	2 large	2
Potato, baked w/ flesh and skin	1 medium	2
Poultry (chicken or turkey), roasted w/ meat and skin	3 oz	1
Bread, whole wheat	1 slice	1

To aid in the absorption of iron, it is important to pair a source of vitamin C with an iron-rich food. Sources of vitamin C include: bell peppers, broccoli, kiwi, guava, citrus, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, snow peas, kale, papaya, and berries. Cooking foods in cast iron cookware can also help improve the iron content of foods.

Some foods and beverages may cause the body to absorb less iron when eaten close together. Avoid eating iron-rich foods with tea, coffee, and calcium sources (like dairy products).

### Questions

If you have any questions or concerns about your iron levels, please call the Wellness Center’s Dial-A-Nurse helpline at (773) 508-8883. To make an appointment with the Wellness Center dietitian you can also book online at <https://www.luc.edu/wellness/nutrition/appointmentservices/>.