

Iron Supplement for Anaemia in Pregnancy

About your medicine

Iron is a mineral that the body needs to produce red blood cells. When the body does not get enough iron, a condition called iron-deficiency anaemia will develop. This is extremely common in pregnancy and may be associated with tiredness and weakness. Iron deficiency anaemia is treated by taking measures to increase your natural iron intake as well as with iron tablets.

How to increase your natural iron intake

Iron is absorbed best from meat, fish and poultry. If possible, eat a portion of meat or fish every day. Liver and liver products, such as liver paté or liver sausage, may contain a lot of vitamin A. Too much vitamin A can harm your baby so try to avoid these products.

If you do not eat meat or fish, have regular servings of non-meat sources of iron. (*See other sources of iron section.*)

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron. Include food or drink containing vitamin C with a meal. (*See good sources of vitamin C section.*)

Rich sources of iron

- Lean beef, pork, lamb roasted or stewed, mince, burgers
- Corned beef
- Chicken and turkey - especially the dark meat like drumsticks
- Tuna, sardines, mackerel, pilchards and salmon

- Grilled sausages
- Fish paste

Other sources of iron

- Eggs (avoid raw or lightly cooked eggs)
- Red kidney beans, haricot, pinto, black-eye beans boiled or canned
- Dahl, lentils, chick peas boiled or canned
- Baked beans and peas
- Nuts and peanut butter
- Whole nuts should not be given to children under five years of age as they can cause choking
- Breakfast cereals with added iron (look at the label)
- Dried fruit - apricots, figs, prunes, raisins and sultanas
- Bread, chapatti, pitta bread made with wholemeal flour
- Cauliflower, spring greens, broccoli, canned mixed vegetables
- Tofu, creamed coconut

Good sources of vitamin C

- Fruit, especially citrus, like oranges, tangerines and clementines
- Fruit juices and squash drinks with added vitamin C
- Salad vegetables, like tomato, pepper, watercress

- Lightly cooked vegetables such as peas, carrots, broccoli, spinach, cauliflower
- Potatoes, especially new potatoes and instant mashed potato

Taking Iron tablets/supplements

Inform your doctor/midwife if you have any of the following conditions before proceeding with iron supplements:

- Haemochromatosis (high iron in the body)
- Thalassaemia
- Allergy to iron products

How should I take the medicine?

Your doctor/midwife will determine the amount of medicine you should take based on the severity of your condition. Take this medicine in the dose prescribed by your doctor/midwife. The supplements may be taken once or more often during the day depending on how low your iron store is. Your doctor/midwife may be using blood tests to monitor your iron level and response to treatment.

Iron is best taken on an empty stomach, 1 hour before or 2 hours after food. If stomach upset is experienced, it may be taken with food to minimise the upset.

Drinking tea with your meal will reduce the amount of iron absorbed, so it is best to avoid it. Instead, have a Vitamin C-rich drink such as fruit juice, or fortified squashes. Also, if you are taking iron supplements it is important not to drink milk, or eat a milk-based product (e.g. milk puddings), for one hour before or after taking the tablets. This is because milk can interfere with the action of the tablet.

Iron supplements may colour your stools black, but you need not stop taking them.

What are the possible side-effects of the medicine?

Most side-effects of taking iron are mild and may not need discontinuation of the supplement unless severe. The following are the possible side-effects:

- dark tarry hard stools
- gastrointestinal upset
- constipation or diarrhoea
- metallic taste, nausea, vomiting
- headaches
- muscle pain

For more information, see the drug information leaflet with the tablets.

References

British National Formulary; 62nd Edition (Sep 2011) British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London

NHS Choices - Have a Healthy Diet in Pregnancy

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/healthy-pregnancy-diet.aspx#close

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

© Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E