

# Iron & School Meals



Iron is the mineral that carries oxygen in the red blood cells. The oxygen is then used throughout the body to produce energy. Iron aides in the body's immune system. It aides in vitamin A and protein metabolism. Children and adolescents are at a higher risk of deficiency as iron needs are highest during rapid growth.

**Nutrient Targets  
for Lunch  
Grade Groupings  
(1/3 RDA's)**

**K-3 = 3.3 mg  
K-6 = 3.5 mg  
4-12= 4.2 mg  
7-12= 4.5 mg**

Animal sources of iron are usually better absorbed than plant sources of iron. For example, iron in red meat is better absorbed than iron from cooked dried beans. The body's ability to absorb iron is increased when foods that contain vitamin C are consumed with foods containing iron. Also, iron from plant sources are better absorbed when consumed with foods containing iron from animal sources.

## Menu Planning

Include a variety of iron-rich foods over the week to meet the nutritional needs of students. Adding ground beef (a good source of iron) to tomato sauce (a good source of vitamin C) is a way to increase the absorption of iron. Choose sources of whole grains, beans, and cereals to increase the intake of this important mineral.

Sources of Iron		
Food Source	Serving Size	Iron in mg
Beans, baked, canned, pork and tomato sauce	1/2 cup	4.0
Beans, white, canned, cooked	1/2 cup	3.3
Lentils, mature seeds, cooked	1/2 cup	3.3
Refried beans, canned	1/2 cup	2.0
Spinach, frozen, chopped, cooked	1/2 cup	1.9
Potato, baked, flesh <u>and skin</u>	1 medium (2.25" x 3.25")	1.9
Beef, ground, 85% lean meat/ 15% fat, cooked	2 oz	1.7
Beans, kidney, red, canned	1/2 cup	1.6
Cereals, ready-to-eat, wheat, shredded, plain	1 cup	1.6
Chickpeas (Garbanzo beans), canned	1/2 cup	1.6
Beans, baked, canned, plain or vegetarian	1/2 cup	1.5
Rolls, hamburger or hotdog, plain	1 roll	1.4
Peas, frozen, cooked, drained	1/2 cup	1.2
Biscuits, plain or buttermilk, commercially baked	2 & 1/2" biscuit	1.2

Source: USDA Database Release CN 15 through NutriKids Version 12.5

This fact sheet was adapted from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction fact sheet: "Iron and School Meals." MyPlate is the new food icon from USDA.

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