



BalanceHealthSM Newsletter

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Spotlight on: Iron

With iron deficiency being the most common nutritional deficiency in the United States, it is important to understand the role iron plays in the body and how to get enough iron into your diet.

Iron is an essential mineral that our bodies need for many functions. Iron is a very important component of hemoglobin, which is the substance in red blood cells that carries oxygen from your lungs to transport it throughout your body. Adequate iron is absolutely essential for maintaining healthy red blood cells. Iron is also necessary to maintain healthy cells, skin, nails, and hair. Getting enough iron during pregnancy is also vital as a severe iron deficiency may increase your baby's risk of being born too early or smaller than average.

Iron deficiency is a concern because it can cause fatigue and even exhaustion, which can have a profound effect on our everyday lives. In infants, an iron deficiency can delay the development of normal motor skills and/or mental function. In teens, iron

deficiency may negatively affect memory.

Symptoms

Although too little iron can impair many body functions, the majority of physical signs and symptoms do not present themselves until they actually have anemia (a severe iron deficiency). Signs of a deficiency include:

- Feeling weak and/or tired
- Decreased performance at work or school
- Difficulty maintaining body temperature
- Decreased immune function – increased susceptibility to infections
- An inflamed tongue – referred to as glossitis
- Slow cognitive or social development during childhood

However, since the early stages of iron deficiency may have no signs or symptoms, it is important to get screened if you are at a higher risk

For more information or advice about iron contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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for this condition. For example, pregnant women have higher iron needs and are often screened during pregnancy to see if they need to increase their iron intake. Also, when people lose blood, they lose iron. Therefore, women who have very heavy menstrual periods, people who donate blood frequently, as well as people with certain stomach and intestinal conditions, may have increased iron needs.

Iron in the Diet

For most people, eating an iron rich diet is enough to get the recommended daily dose. Foods that are high in iron include:

- Red meat
- Egg yolks
- Dark, leafy greens such as spinach and kale
- Dried fruits like raisins or prunes
- Many cereals and grains are enriched with iron
- Shellfish such as clams, oysters, shrimp and scallops
- Beans, chickpeas, lentils, and soybeans
- Liver
- Artichokes

If your doctor determines that you have an iron deficiency, he/she may prescribe an iron supplement in addition to eating an iron rich diet.

It is important to note that although you need an adequate amount of iron, too much iron can build up in the body and become toxic. Your body has no natural way to get rid of the extra iron. Therefore, it will be stored in body tissues, especially the liver, heart, and pancreas and the extra iron can damage your organs. To determine your exact iron needs consult your doctor.

Remember that eni's wellness experts are available to provide you with a nutritional plan that contains plenty of iron rich foods. Our wellness experts can also address any questions or concerns you have regarding vitamins and nutrition in general.



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