

# Iron

## Top nutrients for women

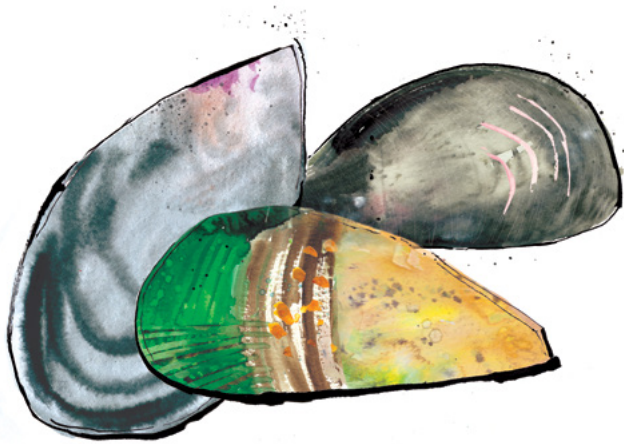


### Why is iron important for women?

Iron helps keep your blood, energy levels and immune system healthy. It also helps carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of your body.

We all need iron, but it's especially important if you have periods – particularly heavy periods – because losing blood can lower your iron levels. This is why young women need about twice as much iron as young men. During pregnancy, you need more iron to support the developing baby.

When your iron levels get too low, you may experience tiredness, weakness, difficulty exercising, brittle nails, headaches and pale skin. Your body may also find it harder to fight infections.



### Where can I find iron?

There are two types of iron that are found in food: iron from animal sources and iron from plant (vegetarian) sources.

Iron from animal sources is easy for your body to absorb. It is found in foods such as:

- red meat (e.g. beef, kangaroo, lamb, pork)
- turkey and chicken
- oysters, clams and mussels
- tinned sardines.

Iron from plant sources isn't absorbed as well as animal-based iron. You can find it mainly in plant (vegetarian) foods such as:

- legumes (e.g. lentils, soy beans)
- dark-green leafy vegetables (e.g. spinach, kale) and broccoli
- nuts and seeds
- dried fruit (e.g. dried apricots, prunes, raisins)
- tofu
- iron-fortified breakfast cereals and bread.



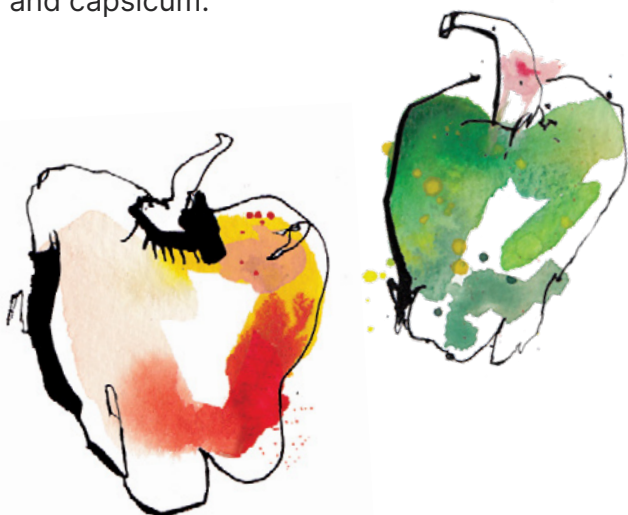
## How can I get enough iron?

There are many ways to get enough iron in your diet.

If you eat red meat (e.g. beef, lamb, pork or veal) try to consume it no more than three or four times per week. Choose lean, unprocessed options and remember that one serve of red meat is roughly the size of the palm of your hand. You can also add plant-based iron for variety.

If you're vegetarian, remember that the iron in plant foods isn't absorbed as well as the iron in animal foods. So, you might need to eat more foods with iron than meat eaters do.

You can help your body absorb iron from plant foods by eating them with vitamin C-rich foods, such as lemon, orange, berries, tomato and capsicum.



If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, talk to your doctor about iron supplements.

And if you have heavy periods or symptoms of low iron, ask your doctor about getting your levels checked.

## Recipe and meal idea

For a meaty iron boost, try veggie-packed beef burgers. Or for a plant-based, iron-rich option, enjoy this black bean and sweet potato nachos recipe, available at [www.jh.today/nachos](http://www.jh.today/nachos)



## Still confused about healthy eating?

To help simplify the complicated, we've created seven more fact sheets on these important nutrients for women:

- Calcium
- Folate
- Iodine
- Magnesium
- Protein
- Vitamin B
- Vitamin D

Get the fact sheets at [jeanhailes.org.au/resources/fact-sheets](http://jeanhailes.org.au/resources/fact-sheets)



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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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