

IRON

Iron is an important nutrient in your diet and it is vital that all athletes have an adequate intake. Iron is needed to make haemoglobin in red blood cells – this carries Oxygen around the body.

If your diet is low in Iron a deficiency can occur which can lead to fatigue by decreasing your oxygen carrying capacity. A deficiency of Iron can result in Anaemia and this can affect your performance and recovery from exercise.

Iron requirements for athletes in heavy training are higher than the general population; therefore it is important to have an adequate intake.

Some dietary practices can increase the risks of developing Anaemia, for example – skipping meals, irregular meals or being vegetarian.

Iron is found in a wide variety of foods but animal sources are generally higher. It is also more easily absorbed from animal sources.

WHERE CAN I FIND IRON?

ANIMAL SOURCES	VEGETABLE SOURCES
Meat – especially red meat Meat products Offal – liver , kidney Poultry Eggs Fish	Pulses – beans, peas, lentils Green leafy vegetables Dried fruit Most breakfast cereals Nuts and seeds Bread

There are other factors that can also affect the *absorption* of Iron:-

- Having fruit juice with a meal – vitamin C increases the absorption of Iron. Also including plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Cooking vegetables quickly in boiling water and not adding bicarb – this destroys all of the vitamins.
- Avoid having tea and coffee with or straight after a meal.
- Try to avoid unnecessary supplementation with other minerals such as calcium and zinc – they interfere with the absorption of Iron. (Unless you have been advised by a Sports Physician/Nutritionist.)

HOW MUCH IRON DO I NEED?

This depends on your age and sex but females do need more than males.

The chart below shows you how much you need daily.

AGE	REFERENCE NUTRIENT INAKE (RNI) FOR IRON – MG / DAY
Males 11-18 years	11.3 mg
Males over 19 years	8.7 mg
Females 11-50 years	14.8 mg

MY IRON REQUIREMENT = MG PER DAY

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR IRON INTAKE

- Try to have a bowl of cereal for breakfast or as a bedtime snack. Most are fortified with Iron – check the label.
- Vitamin C is important to increase absorption of Iron so include plenty of vegetables, fruit or a glass of fruit juice with every meal.
- Have meat 3-4 times a week and eggs 4-5 times a week. They are both excellent sources of Iron.
- If you are vegetarian try to include eggs and a wide variety of protein foods including red pulses, soya beans, Quorn etc.
- Try to include baked beans every week.
- Eat more seeds, nuts and dried fruits – add them to cereals or eat as snacks.
- Include plenty of green leafy vegetables – spinach, broccoli, cabbage etc.
- Use whole meal bread.

WHICH FOODS PROVIDE IRON? – USE THE FOLLOWING CHART TO CHECK THAT YOU ARE GETTING ENOUGH.

FOOD	HANDY MEASURES	WT IN GRAMS	WT IN OZ.	MG IRON
MEAT, FISH ETC				
Beef, mince stewed	Small portion	150g	6oz	5
Beef, lean	2 slices	200g	8oz	4.5
Pork, lean	2 slices	200g	8oz	3
Lamb, lean	2 slices	100g	4oz	3
Chicken	Average portion	100g	4oz	0.5
Liver	portion	100g	4oz	6.5
Liver pate, low fat	Small portion	50g	2oz	
Shepherds pie	Average	300g	12oz	3.5
Egg, boiled	1 medium			1
Sardines /pilchards in tom	2-3	100g	4oz	2
Salmon, canned				0.5
Salmon, fresh	large portion	100g	4oz	1.5
White fish	Steak	150g	6oz	1
Fish paste	Average	100g	4oz	0.5
Baked beans	On bread	15g	½ oz	1
Butter beans	Small can	225g	9oz	3
Red kidney beans/ lentils	Average	75g	3oz	1
Almonds/Cashews/ Brazil nuts	1 tablespoon	25g	1oz	0.5
	A handful	15g	½ oz	0.5
FRUIT AND VEG				
Apricots, dried	10	50g	2oz	3.5
Figs, dried	4	75g	3oz	3.
Raisins/sultanas	1 tablespoon	25g	1oz	0.5
Spinach, boiled	2-4 tabbsp	100g	4oz	1.5
Hummus	Small helping	50g	2oz	1
BREAD, CEREALS				
Allbran/bran buds	Bowl	50g	2oz	6
Branflakes	Bowl	50g	2oz	16.5
Weetabix	2	50g	2oz	3.5
Shredded wheat	2	50g	2oz	2
Muesli	Bowl	50g	2oz	2.5
Special K	Bowl	50g	2oz	6.5
BREAD, CEREALS				
Cornflakes, Frosties, Fruitnibre/ R. Krispies	Bowl	50g	2oz	3.5
Bread, whole meal	3 slices	100g	4oz	2.5
Pitta bread	1 small	75g	3oz	2
Bread roll	1 roll	50g	2oz	1.5
Potato – boiled	3 small	150g	6oz	0.5
Potato – jacket	Large	200g	8oz	1.5
Nutrigrain bar	1 bar			
Tracker bar	1 bar			
MISCELLANEOUS				
Peanut butter	Thick spread	25g	1oz	0.5
Rich fruit cake	1 slice	75g	3oz	1.5
Toasted teacake/bun	1	50g	2oz	1.5
Digestive biscuit	3	50g	2oz	1.5
Sesame/sunflowerseeds	1 tablespoon	15g	1/2oz	1
Tahini	1 teaspoon	25g	1oz	2.5