

Meeting Your Baby's Iron Needs (6-12 Months)

At about six months of age your baby needs more iron than breastmilk alone can provide. Iron is important for growth and brain development. Continue breastfeeding and start offering your baby iron-rich foods every day.

Iron is a mineral we get from animal foods like meats, poultry and fish and plant foods like enriched pasta or cereals, vegetables, tofu and legumes such as dried beans, peas and lentils. Iron from breastmilk or meat, poultry or fish is better absorbed by the body than iron from plant foods. To increase the iron absorption from plant foods serve them with foods rich in vitamin C, or with meat, poultry or fish.

This chart shows how much iron to aim for every day.

Age (months)	Aim for an intake of milligrams (mg/day)	Stay below mg/day
0-6	0.27	40
7-12	11	40

Use the information in this factsheet to help your baby get enough iron for healthy growth.



Steps you can take

Offer your baby iron-rich foods two or more times a day including fish, poultry, meat or meat alternatives and iron-fortified infant cereals.

Start iron-rich foods when your baby is around 6 months of age. Iron-rich foods should be the first foods you introduce to your baby.

For more information on feeding your baby see the additional resource section at the end of this handout.

Some good iron-rich choices are:

Animal Sources	Plant Sources
Beef, veal	Iron-fortified infant cereal
Poultry: chicken, turkey (dark meat has more iron than light meat)	Tofu (choose extra-firm for more iron)
Lamb	Lentils: red, green, brown
Pork	Dried Peas: black-eyed, split peas
Eggs	Dried Beans: soy, black, white, pinto, kidney
Low-mercury fish: trout, mackerel, salmon	Nut butters: almond, cashew, hazelnut, pistachio, soy thinly spread
	Seed butters: sunflower, sesame thinly spread, pumpkin

Increase iron absorption from iron-rich plant foods. Serve them with meats, poultry, fish and/or vitamin C-rich foods such as: cabbage, green or red peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green peas, tomatoes, kiwi, oranges, grapefruits, berries, lychee, honey dew melon, prunes, and mango. Try:

- iron-fortified infant cereal with stewed strawberries
- dahl (lentil stew) or lentils, cooked with green peas
- tofu with broccoli
- enriched pasta with meat-and-tomato sauce

Increase the iron in your baby's meal by cooking food in a cast-iron pan.

Offer your baby iron-fortified infant cereals. Add it to yogurt, homemade muffins, pancakes or pasta sauces.

Find the right balance between solid foods and liquids

If your baby drinks too much liquid, she won't be hungry for iron-rich foods.

Continue to breastfeed for up to two years or longer, but make sure that your baby is also eating solid foods, including at least two iron-rich foods each day.

After 9-12 months of age, 3.25% homogenized whole milk can be given, either in small amounts along with breastmilk, or as the only milk source, if your baby is no longer breastfeeding.

If cow's milk is the only milk source, it is important that your baby is eating a variety of solid foods, including at least two iron-rich foods a day.

Offer up to 2 cups (500 mL) of cow's milk a day, and not more than 3 cups (750 mL).

Give milk and other fluids in a regular cup.

Limit juice to 125-175 mL (1/2-3/4 cup) per day. Offer fruit rather than juice. Your baby does not need juice.

If your baby is not taking any iron-rich foods by 7 months, talk to her health care provider.

Meal ideas for your baby

Try these healthy iron-rich meals. Offer a variety of soft textures from six months of age.

Thick soup or stew made with minced soft-cooked beef, beans, enriched pasta and mixed chopped vegetables.

Minced or finely chopped chicken served with mashed turnip, green peas and quinoa.

Tuna-and-spinach omelette served with whole-grain toast and ripe cantaloupe minced or cut into small pieces.

Black-bean dip spread over whole-wheat toast, served with tomato soup.

Iron-fortified infant cereal served with a chopped hard-boiled egg and chopped kiwi fruit.

Salmon-and-broccoli noodle casserole served with ripe honeydew melon cut into small pieces.

Ground meat mixed with baked beans served with chopped or mashed baked potato and small pieces of soft-cooked asparagus.

Pureed steak served with soft-cooked cauliflower and cheese sauce, frozen green pea/carrot mix and iron-fortified infant cereal.

Homemade blueberry muffin made with iron-fortified infant cereal.

Special Considerations

Iron and Constipation

Eating iron-rich foods will not lead to constipation.

The stool habits of babies can vary. Talk to your doctor if you think your baby is constipated.

Premature infants and low-birth weight infants

Your doctor will likely recommend giving an iron supplement to your baby from 8 weeks until one year of age. Do not give your baby an iron supplement unless recommended by your health care provider.

Iron supplements

Most babies do not need an iron supplement. If you think your baby is not getting enough iron speak with a health care provider. Do not give your baby an iron supplement unless recommended by your health care provider. Too much iron can be harmful.

Vegan/vegetarian infant

Iron from plant foods is not well absorbed. Vegetarians need almost twice as much iron than non-vegetarians. Iron needs can be met with a well planned diet.

Offer a variety of iron-rich plant foods along with vitamin C-rich foods every day to increase iron absorption.



Additional Resources

Food Sources of Vitamin C

[https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?
Portal=UbY=&id=JMfoXAU=&PreviewHandout=bA==](https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMfoXAU=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

Food Sources of Iron

[http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?
Portal=RbCR&id=JMfrUQM=&PreviewHandout=bA==](http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMfrUQM=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

Starting Solids with Your Baby

[https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?
Portal=UbY=&id=JM3rXAM=&PreviewHandout=bA==](https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JM3rXAM=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

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Notes

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