

# How to get your **IRON** from a plant-based diet



**Earthsave**  
Canada

## IRON IN COMMON FOODS

Food Source (Cups)	Iron (mg)
Black beans, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.8
Oatmeal, instant ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	5.5
Chickpeas, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	2.5
Cream of wheat, all types, cooked ( $\frac{3}{4}$ C)	5.7-5.8
Lentils, cooked ( $\frac{3}{4}$ C)	4.9
Fortified cereal, all types (30g)	4-4.3
Kidney beans, cooked ( $\frac{3}{4}$ C)	3.9
Blackstrap molasses (1 Tbsp)	3.6
Spinach, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	2-3.4
Tahini (30mg)	2.7
Granola bar, oat, fruit & nut (32g)	1.2-2.7
Tomato puree ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	2.4
Cracker, soda (6 crackers)	1.5-2.3
Edamame, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.9-2.4
Lima beans, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	2.2
Asparagus, raw (6 spears)	2.1
Tofu (175g)	2
Potato, with skin, cooked (1 medium)	1.3-1.9
Snow peas, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.7
Turnip/beet greens, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.5-1.7
Apricots, dried ( $\frac{1}{4}$ C)	1.6
Beets, canned ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.6
Kale, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.3
Green peas, cooked ( $\frac{1}{2}$ C)	1.3

Lots of other plant-based foods are a good source of iron. Remember to check labels.

## WHY WE NEED IRON

We need iron, mostly, to make the hemoglobin that carries oxygen in our blood.

There are two types of dietary iron, heme and nonheme. On a plant-based diet only nonheme iron is available. Since nonheme iron is not as easily absorbed, Health Canada recommends that we eat 1.8 times as much of that type of iron.

If we don't get enough iron, we develop iron-deficiency anemia. When we have this anemia, our cells can't get enough oxygen, so we feel fatigue, low energy and may have trouble concentrating. This kind of anemia is one of the most common health problems we have in North America. It is most common in menstruating and pregnant women.



### MIX IT UP!

You will absorb more iron if you combine it with a source of vitamin C. Good sources of vitamin C include: broccoli, kale, bell peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, citrus fruits, and strawberries.

Vitamin C interacts in our stomachs with nonheme iron, keeping the iron soluble so that we can absorb it.

Wait 1 hour after eating before having caffeine or calcium supplements; they inhibit iron absorption.

## AVOID TOO MUCH IRON

Make sure you get enough iron, but not too much. Ingesting too much iron leads to iron toxicity. When the body's iron stores are full, the excess iron is deposited in our organs, especially heart and liver, damaging them.



### IMPORTANT

You can usually get enough iron from your diet.

However, it can help a lot to include vitamin C-rich foods in your meals. See the note under our 'Mix it up!' section for some suggestions. A mixed bean salad with lemon vinaigrette or a stir-fry with broccoli and tofu are two tasty, easy suggestions.

Still, many menstruating and pregnant women have difficulty getting enough iron.

During pregnancy, your body needs more iron and it may be hard to meet your higher needs from your diet alone. Your health care provider will likely recommend that you take an iron supplement, as well as a prenatal vitamin supplement.



## GOOD TO KNOW



The recommended daily intake of iron is: 10mg of heme iron; 18mg of nonheme iron.

The daily value for iron, used in nutrition labelling, is based on a recommended daily intake of 14mg.

### Supplements

Taking a supplement 'just in case' is usually not a good idea.



If you take too much iron, you increase your risk of heart and liver damage. Only take supplements if recommended by your health care provider.

### Symptoms of iron deficiency

Feeling fatigued and not able to exercise as you once did are the most common signs of iron insufficiency anemia. Other fairly common signs may include headache, dizziness, irritability, difficulty maintaining body temperature, a red and inflamed tongue, and sometimes a rapid or irregular heartbeat.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, consult your health care provider.

## Recommended daily amounts

(nonheme iron)

Infants are born with about a 6 month supply of iron and need much less, easily met by breast milk or infant formula.

Children 7m-1y: 17mg

1y-3y: 13mg

4y-8y: 18mg

9y-13y: 15mg

Girls, 14y-18y: 27mg

Boys, 14y-18y: 17mg

Men 19y+: 15mg

Pre-menopausal women 19y+: 32mg

Pregnant women: 49mg

Post-menopausal women: 15mg

All of us should keep our daily intake below 80 mg of non-heme iron (45 mg for heme iron), a very easy thing to do!

### EarthsavE Canada

A registered charity since 1992, our mission is to change the world by promoting the widespread adoption of plant-based diets. We use evidence-based education to increase awareness of the ways in which choosing a plant-based diet will lead to a healthier, kinder, and more sustainable world.

For additional information visit  
[earthsavE.ca](https://earthsavE.ca)



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