

Why Iron is SO Important in the Diet

We have all heard that iron is important in our diets, but why? Why should we be eating a diet high in iron? For a very important reason...

Iron plays a crucial role in the body. It is needed to form haemoglobin in red blood cells, and this is what is used to transport oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Therefore we need to maintain an adequate supply of iron and we do this through our diets. If we don't, our bodies cannot keep up with its oxygen transport needs. This is called iron deficiency. Women are at a higher risk of iron deficiency due to Good ol' Aunt Flow (menstrual bleeding).

If iron deficiency becomes severe, it leads to iron deficient anaemia, which comes with symptoms including constant feeling of tiredness, dizziness, headaches, feeling cold and pale skin. Including iron rich foods in your diet is a great way to ensure you maintain a good level of iron in the body and avoid becoming iron deficient.

So what foods are high in iron? Oysters and liver top the charts so indulge yourself in some oysters and pate when you can! Otherwise, red meat, egg yolks, fish and chicken are also great sources of iron. Plant based foods high in iron include dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale and broccoli, walnuts, beans, lentils, chickpeas and lima beans. Prunes and prune juice are good sources of iron as well as iron-fortified cereals and breads. Iron from meat and animal products such as eggs are easier for the body to absorb, compared to iron from plant based foods such as fortified cereals and breads. Including a variety of both forms of iron helps to maintain a good supply in the body.

Now foods containing caffeine and calcium can inhibit the absorption of iron and should be avoided when eating an iron rich food. Tea and coffee, as well as milk are a no-no. You should leave about an hour either side of eating an iron rich food before consuming caffeine or calcium. On the other end of the spectrum, we have foods that can help the absorption of iron. Foods containing vitamin C should be combined with iron rich foods, especially plant based. Oranges or orange juice, citrus fruits in general, kiwifruits, strawberries, capsicum and broccoli are all good sources of vitamin C.

So we know iron is important for us to consume in our diets. We know what foods are high in iron as well as what foods can inhibit and assist in the absorption of iron. Now all we need to do is ensure that we get a good variety of iron rich foods, every day, combined with a little vitamin C, to support a healthy, happy and energetic body.