



Iron-rich foods for babies and toddlers

Why is iron important for my child?

Iron is a mineral that's used to help make red blood cells and carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Children need iron for healthy growth and development, including brain development.

How can I make sure my child has enough iron?

Introduce iron-rich foods to your baby at around 6 months. This is when your baby's iron supply starts to decrease. It's also when your baby needs more than just human milk (breast milk) or infant formula to meet their growing nutrient needs. As you introduce solid foods to your baby, there are many things you can do to make sure your baby gets enough iron.

Offer iron-rich foods every day

Your baby's first foods should be rich in iron. Offer your baby iron-rich foods:

- At least twice a day from 6 to 12 months
- At each meal from 12 to 36 months

Many foods can help your child get enough iron. There are 2 types of iron found in food:

- **Heme iron:** This type is easily absorbed and is found in meat, poultry, fish and shellfish. Choose fish low in mercury, such as salmon, trout and mackerel
- **Non-heme iron:** This type is not as easily absorbed. It's found in eggs and plant-based foods like beans, lentils, tofu, and nut and seed butters. Cereal-based products may have iron added to them, such as fortified infant cereal, biscuits and puffs. Check the nutrition facts table to be sure

Offer different food combinations to increase iron absorption

You can help your child absorb more non-heme

iron from eggs and plant-based iron sources by offering them at the same time as:

- Meat, poultry, fish or shellfish
- Foods that are high in vitamin C. This includes vegetables and fruits such as broccoli, snow peas, red cabbage, bell peppers, kiwi, mango, papaya, peaches, strawberries and oranges

Follow guidelines for offering cow milk

Cow milk can increase the risk of iron deficiency if it's introduced too early. You can start offering small amounts of pasteurized whole cow milk (3.25% milk fat) in an open cup if your baby is:

- 9 to 12 months of age and
- Eating a variety of iron-rich foods

Too much milk can fill up your child's tummy and take the place of iron-rich foods. Do not offer more than 3 cups (750 mL) of cow milk in a day.

After age 2, other options include skim, 1% and 2% cow milk and plain fortified soy beverage.

What are some iron-rich meals and snacks I can offer my child?

Below are sample meals and snacks that include foods suitable for babies and toddlers. Be sure to prepare foods so that they're a safe size and texture for your child.

Sample meals

- Oatmeal pancakes made with iron-fortified infant cereal (see recipe below)
- Ground beef, snow peas, brown rice
- Dahl (lentil stew), bell peppers, naan
- Salmon, red cabbage, quinoa
- Tofu, ground pork, broccoli, congee (rice porridge)

- Smooth peanut, tree nut or seed butters blended with an equal amount of warm water and stirred into iron-fortified infant cereal

Sample snacks

- Black bean dip spread on toast, mango
- Peanut butter banana muffins made with iron-fortified infant cereal (see recipe below)
- Yogurt mixed with iron-fortified infant cereal, strawberries

Iron-fortified infant cereal can be an important source of iron for your child. Here are some ways to use iron-fortified infant cereal in recipes.

Oatmeal pancake recipe

Yields: 24 pancakes

Each pancake contains 1.8 mg of iron

Ingredients:

- 160 mL (2/3 cup) rolled oats
- 375 mL (1 ½ cups) water
- 125 mL (1/2 cup) whole wheat flour
- 250 mL (1 cup) iron-fortified infant cereal
- 15 mL (1 Tbsp) baking powder
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 45 mL (3 Tbsp) vegetable oil

Instructions:

- Add water to oats. Let soak for 5 minutes
- In another bowl, mix flour, infant cereal and baking powder
- Add eggs and oil to oat mixture
- Add oat mixture to dry ingredients
- Add 2 tablespoons of batter onto a greased frying pan or griddle on medium heat
- Cook for about 3 minutes on each side, until lightly browned and cooked through

Mini peanut butter banana muffin recipe

Yields: 24 mini muffins

Each muffin contains 1.9 mg of iron. This amount will vary if other nut butters are used.

Ingredients:

- 250 mL (1 cup) whole wheat flour
- 10 mL (2 tsp) baking powder
- 5 mL (1 tsp) cinnamon
- 250 mL (1 cup) iron-fortified infant cereal
- 125 mL (1/2 cup) water
- 60 mL (1/4 cup) vegetable oil
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 60 mL (1/4 cup) peanut butter or other tree nut butter
- 2 ripe mashed bananas

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 175°C (350°F)
- Mix flour, baking powder, cinnamon and infant cereal in a large bowl
- In a separate bowl, mix water, oil, eggs, nut butter and bananas
- Mix wet ingredients into dry ingredients
- Spoon batter into 24 greased mini muffin cups
- Bake for 12-14 minutes

For more information

If you're worried that your child is not getting enough iron, discuss with a health care provider.

[HealthLinkBC File #69c Baby's first foods](#)

[HealthLinkBC File #68d Iron in foods](#)

[HealthLinkBC File #110b Preventing choking in babies and young children](#)