

# Iron-rich foods for babies & young children

## Why is iron important?

- Iron is important for your child's growth and brain development.
- Iron deficiency may lead to learning problems later in life - preventing low iron is best.



## How can you help your child get enough iron?

- Introduce iron-rich foods when your baby is about 6 months old and showing signs of being ready to start eating solid foods. This is when your baby's iron stores start to decrease and when they need more than just human milk or formula.
- For babies age 6 to 12 months – offer iron-rich foods at least 2 times a day.
- For children over age 12 months – offer iron-rich foods at least 3 times a day.
- Babies learn to eat by watching you – sit down and eat iron-rich foods with your baby or child.
- If your child eats no meat or fish, ensure they get enough iron from other foods, and talk to a dietitian if you have questions.

## Offer iron-rich foods

Prepare iron-rich foods by mashing, grinding, mincing or pureeing. Or offer small pieces as finger foods.

- Well-cooked game meat, beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey
- Well-cooked or canned fish and shellfish
- Well-cooked eggs
- Beans (kidney, black, soya, chickpeas), lentils, tofu
- Hummus, sesame butter (tahini), pumpkin seed butter
- Hemp seeds, chia seeds
- Spinach, beet greens, green peas
- Iron- fortified infant cereal
- Whole grain & fortified cereal, breads or pasta



For recipe ideas, check out [Iron-rich foods for babies and toddlers | HealthLink BC](#)

## Boost iron absorption

- Vitamin C found naturally in vegetables and fruits boosts iron absorption from eggs and plant-based foods.
- Include vegetables and/or fruit with meals and snacks, like berries, kiwi, melons, broccoli, tomatoes or tomato sauce.



## Add iron-fortified infant cereal to other foods

- Mashed vegetables or fruits
- Mashed black beans, kidney beans or lentils
- Soups and stews
- Breads, muffins, loaves, or pancakes



## Follow the guidelines for offering milk

- Wait until your baby is at least 9 to 12 months old AND eating a variety of iron-rich foods before introducing small amounts of whole fat pasteurized cow milk.
- Too much milk can fill your child's tummy and take the place of iron-rich foods. For children age 1 to 2 years, limit whole fat pasteurized cow milk to 500 to 750 mL (2 to 3 cups) a day.

## More ideas to boost iron

- Include meat, fish or poultry with meals – even small amounts of these foods will boost iron absorption from non-meat foods.
- Include the juices from well-cooked meats in foods.
- Include blackstrap molasses in cooking or baking (such as in muffins).
- Cook in cast iron or stainless-steel pots.



### More resources

- [Iron-rich foods for babies and toddlers | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Iron in Foods | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Vegan feeding guidelines for babies and toddlers | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Vegetarian feeding guidelines for babies and toddlers | HealthLink BC](#)



### Questions about your child's nutrition?

- Call [HealthLink BC 8-1-1 Services](#) and ask for a Dietitian
- [Email a HealthLinkBC Dietitian | HealthLink BC](#)
- Ask your Doctor or Nurse to refer you to an outpatient dietitian (a free service).