how to get the iron you need at any age

Infants 7-12 months

NEED
11mg/day, based on a mixed diet of animal and plant foods

BENEFITS
Infant iron stores accumulated during pregnancy are likely to run out at around six months old.

BOOST IRON
☑ Breastfeed your baby until 12 months or beyond, if possible, because breast milk contains some iron.
☑ When introducing solids at around six months old, include an iron-fortified baby cereal.
☑ Introduce cooked and puréed meat to an infant's diet from around six months.

Children

NEED
1-3 years: 9mg/day
4-8 years: 10mg/day
9-13 years: 8mg/day

BENEFITS
Growth spurts during these ages increase the need for blood and iron.

BOOST IRON
☑ Use lean mince meat to make rissoles, burger patties and meatballs.
☑ Encourage eating iron-fortified cereals at breakfast accompanied by a small ½ cup drink of citrus juice. Water the juice down for younger children.

Adolescents

NEED
Girls: 14-18 years 15mg/day. Boys: 14-18 years 11mg/day

BENEFITS
In girls, menstruation may not be regular and cause more blood-loss some months than others. Young women may also experiment with vegetarianism and dieting. Young men need iron for muscle development.

BOOST IRON
☑ Get teenagers to cook an iron-rich meal for the family.
☑ Mix lentils, legumes and brown rice with colourful steamed vegetables.

Adult women

NEED
19-50 years: 18mg/day

BENEFITS
Menstrual losses for women vary, so a higher intake of iron is required until menopause.

BOOST IRON
☑ Cook in bulk so homemade, convenience meals rich in iron can be pulled from the freezer and reheated when you are pressed for time.
☑ Aim to choose meat dishes a few times a week.
☑ Use mussels in soups or pasta dishes.

Pregnant women

NEED
27mg/day

BENEFITS
Pregnant women absorb iron more efficiently but they also have a larger blood volume and increased needs in the second and third trimesters. Additional iron is needed for foetal growth and development.

BOOST IRON
☑ Incorporate some lean meat at lunch and at dinner.
☑ Use iron supplements if prescribed for iron-deficiency anaemia. To prevent constipation, increase fibre and fluids.

Adult men

NEED
19-50 years: 18mg/day

BENEFITS
Men need adequate iron to help fuel activity, especially if they are physically active at work.

BOOST IRON
☑ Eat a palm-sized piece of cooked meat or 2-3 thin slices of roast meat. Watch your serving sizes.
☑ Enjoy a small handful of nuts to reduce the risk of heart disease and get a dose of non-haem iron.

Over 50s

NEED
Everyone older than 50 years: 8mg/day

BENEFITS
Once women reach menopause, the amount of iron they require decreases. Older people living alone can become malnourished because of poverty, depression, and having chewing and swallowing difficulties.

BOOST IRON
☑ Wait 30 minutes before you drink tea after meals so tannins don't bind with iron in meals and prevent absorption.
☑ Eat slow-cooked or minced meats if your teeth don't cope well with chewing.

Vegetarians

NEED
Iron absorption from plant foods is low, so vegetarians need 80% more non-haem iron to compensate.

BENEFITS
Risk of iron deficiency is higher with poorly organised or new vegetarians, and also vegans.

BOOST IRON
☑ Eat vitamin C-rich foods with plant foods rich in non-haem iron in the same meal.
☑ See a dietitian or qualified nutritionist to help plan your vegetarian meals.
☑ Speak to your doctor about testing your iron levels and whether you need a supplement.