



For The Early Learning Centre Sector

Nutrition Fact Sheet

The Importance of Iron In Early Childhood



Iron is a vital mineral essential for the overall health and wellbeing of children. Toddlers in particular have high iron requirements due to rapid growth and development, increased activity levels and expansion of blood volume. Given these factors, in this fact sheet, we explore various strategies to assist children in meeting their iron requirements needed for healthy growth and development.

Key Messages -

- Toddlers have high iron requirements per unit of body weight compared to adults.
- Iron is important for supporting cognitive development, maintaining energy levels and strengthening the immune system.
- Foods high in iron include red meat, legumes, lentils, dark green leafy vegetables and iron fortified cereals.
- Pairing vitamin C with an iron rich food can further enhance iron absorption.

Understanding Iron Requirements in Young Children

Increased Iron Needs -

Toddlers have higher iron requirements per unit of body weight compared to adults. This is due to their rapid growth, heightened activity levels and expansion of blood volume during this crucial stage of development.

Importance of Iron -

Iron plays a vital role in various bodily functions, including oxygen transport, energy production and immune function. Adequate iron intake is essential for supporting cognitive development, maintaining energy levels and strengthening the immune system in young children.

How Much Iron Is Needed?

Iron requirements are based on age -

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

How Much Iron Are In Commonly Consumed Foods?

Iron rich food sources include -

- Red meat such as beef and lamb.
- Legumes and lentils.
- Dark green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, kale and spinach.
- Tofu.
- Iron fortified cereals such as Weet-Bix.

Please see the table on the following page for the iron content of common foods.



Food	Portion	Iron
Beef	100g	3.5mg
Lamb	100g	2.5mg
Salmon	100g	1.28mg
Tuna	100g	1.07mg
Pork	100g	0.4mg
Chicken	100g	0.4mg
Weet-Bix	30g	4.2mg
Kidney Beans	1 cup	3.1mg
Raw Spinach	1 cup	1.2mg
Broccoli	1 cup	0.86mg
Chickpeas	1 cup	2.7mg
Tofu	100g	3mg

Strategies For Meeting Iron Needs

Include iron rich foods -

- Include beef and lamb dishes throughout the week.
- Include dark green leafy vegetables with dinner meals such as kale, spinach and broccoli.

- When having a vegetarian meal, include high iron meat alternatives such as tofu, legumes and lentils.
- Choose an iron fortified cereal daily such as Weet-Bix.

Pair Iron with Vitamin C -

Enhance iron absorption by pairing iron rich foods with sources of vitamin C. This includes -

- Citrus fruit.
- Strawberries.
- Tomatoes.
- Capsicum.



Summary

Meeting the iron needs of young children is essential for supporting their growth, development and overall health. By incorporating iron rich foods into their diets, pairing iron with vitamin C and offering balanced meals, parent and caregivers can help to ensure that children are receiving sufficient iron to thrive during this critical stage of their development.

For more information, please visit:
Queensland Government - Iron for Toddlers and Children
<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/condition/child-health/diet-and-eating/iron-for-toddlers-and-children>
NSW Government - Caring For Your Child - Birth To Five Years
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/caring-for-children-manual.pdf>

