

Meeting Your Baby's Iron Needs when Breastfeeding (6-12 Months)

At about six months of age your baby needs more iron than breast milk alone can provide. Iron is important for growth and brain development. Continue breastfeeding but start offering your baby iron-rich foods every day.

Iron is a mineral we get from animal foods like meats, poultry and fish and plant foods like enriched pasta or cereals, vegetables, tofu and legumes such as dried beans, peas and lentils. Iron from animal foods is better absorbed by your body than iron from plant foods. To increase the iron absorption from plant foods serve them with foods rich in vitamin C, or with meat, poultry or fish.

This chart shows how much iron to aim for every day.

Age (months)	Aim for an intake of milligrams (mg/day)	Stay below mg/day
0-6	0.27	40
7-12	11	40

Use the information in this factsheet to help your baby get enough iron for healthy growth.



Steps you can take

Give your baby a variety of iron-rich foods every day. Include at least one iron-rich food at each meal.

- Start iron-rich foods when your baby can sit in a high chair with support (about 6 months). Give one new food at a time. Once well tolerated, try another new food.

- To prevent the risk of choking, choose the right texture of food for your baby. The food should be easy to chew and swallow.
- For more information on feeding your baby see the additional resource section at the end of this handout.

Some good iron-rich choices are:

Animal Sources	Plant Sources
Beef, veal	Tofu (choose extra-firm for more iron)
Poultry: chicken, turkey (dark meat has more iron than light meat)	Iron-fortified infant cereal
Lamb	Lentils: red, green, brown
Pork	Dried Peas: black-eyed, split peas
Eggs	Dried Beans: soy, black, white, pinto, kidney
Low-mercury fish: trout, mackerel, salmon	Nut butters: almond, cashew, hazelnut, pistachio, soy thinly spread
	Seed butters: sunflower, sesame thinly spread, pumpkin

- Increase iron absorption from iron-rich plant foods. Serve them with meats, poultry, fish and/or vitamin C-rich foods such as: cabbage, green or red peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green peas, tomatoes, kiwi, oranges, grapefruits, berries, lychee, honey dew melon, prunes, and mango. Try:
 - Infant cereal with stewed strawberries
 - Dahl (lentil stew) or lentils, cooked with green peas
 - Tofu with broccoli
 - Enriched pasta with meat-and-tomato sauce
- Increase the iron in your baby's meal by cooking food in a cast-iron pan.

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- Offer your baby iron-fortified infant cereals. Add it to yogurt, homemade muffins, pancakes or pasta sauces.
 - Continue to offer your baby breast milk first, followed by iron-rich foods, until 9 months. Breast milk contains iron. After nine months offer iron-rich food first followed by breast milk.
 - Offer homo milk (3.25% milk fat) when your baby is 9-12 months and if she is eating a variety of iron-rich foods. Cow's milk is low in iron.
 - Limit juice to 60-125 mL (¼-½ cup) per day. Offer your baby fruit rather than juice. Your baby does not need juice. Juice can fill your baby up leaving less room for iron-rich foods.
 - If your baby is not taking any iron-rich foods by 7 months, talk to his health care provider.

Meal ideas for your baby

Try these healthy iron-rich meals once you have given each of the following foods singly to your baby. Don't forget to choose the right texture to help prevent choking.

- Thick soup or stew made with beef, beans, enriched pasta and mixed vegetables. Chicken served with mashed turnip, green peas and quinoa.
- Tuna-and-spinach omelette served with whole-grain toast and cantaloupe.
Black-bean dip spread over whole-wheat crackers, served with tomato soup.
- Cream of wheat or Infant cereal served with an egg and kiwi fruit.
- Salmon-and-broccoli noodle casserole served with honeydew melon.
- Ground meat mixed with baked beans served with baked potato and asparagus.
- Steak served with cauliflower and cheese sauce, frozen green pea/carrot mix and infant cereal.
- Home made blueberry muffin made with infant cereal.

Special Considerations

Iron and Constipation

- Eating iron-rich foods will not lead to constipation.
- The stool habits of babies can vary. Talk to your doctor if you think your baby is constipated.

Premature infants and low-birth-weight infants

- Your doctor will likely recommend giving an iron supplement to your baby from 8 weeks until one year of age. Do not give your baby an iron supplement unless recommended by your health care provider.

Iron supplements

- Most babies do not need an iron supplement. If you think your baby is not getting enough iron speak with a health care provider. Do not give your baby an iron supplement unless recommended by your health care provider. Too much iron can be harmful.

Vegan/vegetarian infant

- Iron from plant foods is not well absorbed. Vegetarians need almost twice as much iron than non-vegetarians. Iron needs can be met with a well planned diet.
- Offer a variety of iron-rich plant foods along with vitamin C-rich foods every day.



Additional Resources

- [Food Sources of Vitamin C](#)
- [Food Sources of Iron](#)
- [BFI Starting Solids with Your Baby When Breastfeeding](#)

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.



Notes

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