

Endurance Coach

Nutrition Newsletter

"Iron"

Well, it's May already and the middle of the year is creeping up on us. By now, hopefully everyone is training hard and has a great nutrition plan in place. Today we are going to look at one of the important minerals in our diet and that is iron! It's important for everyone to understand the main role of iron and also what foods we can get it from, especially for those vegetarian eaters out there.

WHAT IS IRON??

Iron is an element that aids main brain function, helps carry oxygen around the body, as well as improving our immune system and the way it works. If we do not have enough iron in our body we become deficient and start feeling tired and lethargic. Training will be affected and if not treated, then it can lead to iron deficiency anaemia, which can impair athlete's performance. Athletes with this illness can be sick for months and it takes a long time to get back to normal health and fitness levels. That's why prevention of iron deficiency is the best option.

WHERE CAN I GET IRON??

The best sources of iron are from foods. Dietary iron comes in two main forms, haem iron and non-haem iron. Haem is the richest source of iron found mostly in animal foods and is more easily absorbed into the body, where as non-haem iron is found in plant foods and is not as easily absorbed.

Haem iron food sources (Well-absorbed)	Non-haem iron food sources (Poorly absorbed)
Chicken	Tofu
Red meat – steak, beef, mince	Beans – kidney beans, baked beans,

	peas
Fish and seafood – oysters, mussels, tuna, sardines	Vegetables – spinach, broccoli, silverbeet
Pork	Breads and cereals
Liver pate	Dried fruits - apricots, sultanas, raisins
Turkey	Nuts and seeds
	Boiled egg

HOW MUCH IRON DO I NEED??

Some people and certain athletes need a higher intake of iron due to larger blood losses from bleeding in the gut and also red cell destruction. Females, adolescents, pregnant women and distance runners should aim for the higher levels of iron and have their blood iron levels regularly checked by the doctors.

Age groups	Iron (mg/day)
Adolescents (aged 12 -18 years)	10 - 13
Women (aged 19 - 54 years)	12 - 16
Pregnant women	22 - 36
Women (aged 54+ years)	5 - 7
Men (aged 19+ years)	7

HANDY TIPS

Other factors that help with iron absorption are:

- Eat ascorbic acid (vitamin C) with iron-containing foods as this will increase the absorption
- Eat non-haem iron sources with meats, as this will also boost iron absorption.
- Avoid tea and coffee in the first 1-2 hours of meals as they contain an acid called tannic acid, which reduces iron absorption.
- Go for foods that are fortified in iron – some breads and cereals contain these.
- Vegetarian eaters – make sure you eat a wide range of vegetables and have regular iron check-ups by your doctor.

References

Howe.M., Hellems.J., Rehrer.N., Pearce.J. 2002. *Sports nutrition for New Zealand athletes and coaches.*

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

'RASPBERRY SORBET'

INGREDIENTS

1 large cup of frozen raspberries or mixed berries
2 tablespoons of icing sugar
2 teaspoons of lemon juice
250g sweetened strawberry yoghurt

METHODS

Place frozen berries in a food processor and blend until nearly crushed. Add in icing sugar, lemon juice and yoghurt. Blend until smooth.

Spoon 2 large tablespoons of sorbet into 6 wine glasses and serve. Can be made earlier and placed into the freezer for a more frozen sorbet or served immediately.