

## Iron and School Meals

Iron is the mineral that carries oxygen in the red blood cells. The oxygen is then used throughout the body to produce energy. Iron also aides in the body's immune system, and vitamin A and protein metabolism. Children and adolescents are at a higher risk of deficiency as iron needs are highest during rapid growth.

### Menu Planning

Include a variety of iron-rich foods over the week to meet the nutritional needs of students. Combining good sources of iron (ground beef) with good source of vitamin C (tomato sauce) is a way to increase the absorption of iron. Choose sources of whole grains and enriched or fortified grains to increase the intake of this important mineral. Compare the nutrition labels of products to determine the iron content. Remember, processed meats may vary greatly in iron content.

Nutrient Targets for Lunch Grade Groupings (1/3 RDA's)
K-3 = 3.3 mg.
K-6 = 3.5 mg.
4-12 = 4.2 mg.
7-12 = 4.5 mg.



Meat/Meat Alternate	Grains/Breads	Fruits	Vegetables
Almonds Dry beans and peas Eggs Fish Meats – Beef and Pork Peanut Butter Poultry	Enriched or whole-grain bread and grain products such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Slice of bread</li> <li>▪ ½ cup rice</li> <li>▪ ½ cup cooked cereal</li> <li>▪ ¾ ounce or 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal</li> </ul>	Apricots (canned) Cherries (canned) Dried Fruits (apples, apricots, blueberries, dates, figs, peaches, plums, raisins)	Asparagus Beans (green, wax, lima) Bean Sprouts Beets (canned) Black-eyed Peas Broccoli Brussels Sprouts Parsnips Green Peas Potatoes, fresh, baked Salsa Sweet Potatoes, canned Tomato Juice, Paste, Puree, and Sauce Dark Leafy Vegetables (bean greens, chard, collards, kale, mustard greens, spinach, turnip greens) Vegetable Juice

**Iron in Food**

Animal sources of iron are usually better absorbed than plant sources of iron. For example, iron in red meat is better absorbed than iron from cooked dried beans. The body's ability to absorb iron is increased when foods that contain vitamin C are consumed with foods containing iron. Also, iron from plant sources are better absorbed when consumed with foods containing iron from animal sources.

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