



-Iron-Deficiency Anemia-

DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Iron supplements are hard for the body to assimilate and should not take the place of nutrient-rich foods. Therefore, it is important to include daily portions of iron-rich foods in your diet. These include dark green leafy vegetables, sunflower and pumpkin seeds, organic unsulphured dried fruits (raisins, prunes, black mission figs, apricots, and cherries), blackstrap molasses, beets, red beans, dark turkey meat, eggs, and organ meats (provided they are from organic sources). Also, many of the plants listed under "Herbal Recommendations" can be used as vegetables.
- Seaweeds, most notably kelp (kombu) and dulse, are very rich sources of iron. They can be eaten as vegetables (refer to macrobiotic cookbooks, available at natural foods stores, for recipes); in powdered or flaked form they can be sprinkled on foods; or, if you can't tolerate the taste, they can be taken in capsules. Take 1 to 2 tablespoons of flakes or powder, or approximately 8 "00" capsules daily.
- Eat foods high in iron with vitamin C (250 to 500 mg of C with each meal but do not exceed 2,000 mg per day). Vitamin C assists in the absorption of iron. Of course, all nutrients work in concert, so be certain that your overall diet is well balanced.
- Dairy products may inhibit iron absorption, so have iron-rich meals and dairy-rich meals at different times. Don't take your iron supplements with dairy products.
- Caffeine and phosphates in soda interfere with iron absorption (and inhibit appetite, preventing adequate nutritional intake), so decrease your consumption or omit pop from your diet.
- Cooking in cast-iron pots increases the iron content of foods, so use them whenever possible
- Regular exercise increases the body's demand for oxygen. This causes a response in the body that allows iron to be absorbed more easily, as iron occurs in the red blood cells as part of the oxygen carrying capacity.
- If you do choose to take an iron supplement, use a chelated iron. (Chelated means that the mineral is chemically bound to another substance that the body can more easily absorb than the mineral itself and thus acts as a vehicle for the absorption of the mineral.) Ferrous gluconate, ferrous fumarate, and ferrous lactate are considered the most easily absorbable forms of iron.
- Iron supplements may be most easily digested when taken with a meal, particularly with dinner if you are prone to nausea earlier in the day.

NOTE: Commercial and prescription iron supplements may do more harm than good, particularly if they are causing constipation or other digestive upsets. In fact, I have often recommended that pregnant women discontinue iron pills because assimilating them is too taxing on the body. Herbal and dietary approaches to increasing your blood levels of iron are usually more effective.

HERBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- An excellent iron tonic for pregnant women is the humble herb, nettle. Not only is this plant rich in iron and other minerals, it also strengthens the blood vessels, the kidneys, and the adrenal glands. You can take it daily throughout pregnancy to increase your blood count. My own preference is for a very dark green and strong-tasting brew, made by steeping a large handful of the dried herb in 1 quart of boiling water for a couple of hours. If you prefer a milder brew, steep 3 to 4 tablespoons of the herb per quart of boiling water for thirty minutes. Drink between 1 and 4 cups daily depending on your needs.
- Iron Tonic Syrup-This version of yellow dock and dandelion syrup increases iron supplies and encourages iron to be liberated from the liver. It also eases the constipation associated with both anemia and commercial iron supplements. Place 1/2 ounce each of yellow dock and dandelion roots into a quart jar and fill with boiling water. Cover the jar and steep for four to eight hours. Strain the liquid into a small stainless steel or glass pot, and simmer uncovered until the liquid is reduced to 1 cup. Add 1/2 cup of blackstrap molasses (also high in iron), stir well, and turn off the heat. Pour into a jar, cool to room temperature, label the jar, and store it in the refrigerator. It will keep for many months. Dosage is 1 to 2 tablespoons daily. Take each dose with 250 mg of vitamin C for enhanced iron absorption.
- Yellow dock and dandelion root tinctures can be taken twice a day on those occasions when you are unable to carry your syrup with you-for example, if you are traveling. Take 30 drops of each twice daily. However, this is not a long-term substitute for the syrup because the alcohol extract does not contain substantial amounts of iron. The alcohol extract does assist your body in better assimilating the iron that is available and liberates iron stored in your liver, making it more available in your general circulation.
- Liquid chlorophyll, usually derived from alfalfa, is another herbal source of iron. Take 1 tablespoon daily (not more unless so directed on the product label) as a supplement.
- Floradix Iron and Herbs is a supplement made from iron and extracts of dried fruits and herbs. It is delicious, easy to take, and can be purchased at most natural foods stores. Many women have good results when using it along with the dietary recommendations and perhaps another of the herbal recommendations included here.
- Chinese herbal formulas, such as dong quai and peony formula can be beneficial for women with a history of anemia. Seek the assistance of a person trained in Chinese diagnosis and herbal prescription, and refer to "Resources" for suppliers of Chinese herbal formulas.