

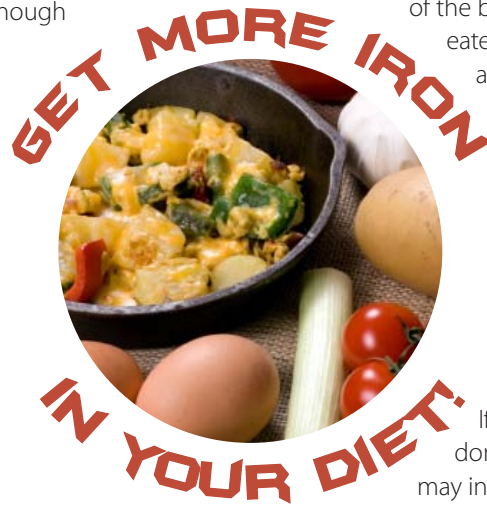
Q. My doctor says I'm a little low on iron. I've tried taking iron pills but they kill my stomach. What foods are high in iron?

A. Everyone's diet should include enough iron. Iron is an essential mineral for your body. It contributes to healthy red blood cells, which carry oxygen throughout your body. It also helps your muscle cells use and store oxygen. Iron can also increase resistance to infection and help the healing process.

The National Institutes of Health and other agencies recommend the following foods as good sources of iron:

- Eggs (yolk)
- Fish
- Leafy greens of the cabbage family (broccoli, kale, turnip greens, collards)
- Legumes (peas, beans, lentils, soybeans)
- Meat – especially liver and other organ meats
- Poultry – especially liver and dark meat
- Raisins
- Whole-grain bread

Iron is lost in cooking some foods, even under the best conditions. To minimize iron loss, cook foods in the least amount of water possible and for the shortest possible time. It's also important to make sure your diet includes high-quality proteins with iron for absorption. Soy is one



of the best. Also, iron is absorbed better when eaten with foods high in vitamin C (fresh fruits and vegetables, such as fresh peppers, berries, and citrus).

You indicate that iron pills hurt your stomach. Iron pills can be hard on certain people. While you get the best iron absorption when you take iron supplements with an empty stomach, try taking the supplements with food. And try taking smaller amounts at each meal rather than one large dose at once.

If you take them with food, be sure you don't take them with milk or antacids, as they may interfere with the absorption of iron.

It's also important to know why a person is low on iron. Women during the menstrual years need more iron. Some people have bleeding ulcers in the gastro-intestinal system and if this is the case, this condition needs treating first. It can usually be detected by blood in the stool. Your doctor can order this test.

Continue working with your doctor. If you cannot get enough iron through the foods you eat and continue having stomach problems with the iron supplements, your doctor can give you iron supplementation through a vein or by an injection into the muscle. You would also probably find it helpful to work with a nutritionist in concert with your physician.

