

managing low iron levels

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis

Iron is a mineral that's an important part of hemoglobin (a protein that carries oxygen on red blood cells from the lungs to the rest of the body). When iron levels become low, the hemoglobin doesn't carry enough oxygen to the body cells. This is commonly referred to as iron deficiency anemia, anemia, or low-iron. The most common symptoms of iron deficiency include lack of energy, heart palpitations, and a pale complexion.

Iron is absorbed in the small intestines, and a deficiency can occur in Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Those with crohn's disease are at the greatest risk of deficiency, especially during a flare. Low-iron levels can also happen because of blood-loss from a bleeding intestinal ulcer, decreased iron absorption after surgery, or a diet low in iron-rich foods.

Iron requirements may change during a flare, remission, or because of other health conditions. It's always best to work with a registered dietitian and your doctor to determine specific recommendations. The general recommendations for iron for healthy people are listed below:

- Men (ages 19 years and older): 8 mg per day
- Older Women (ages 51 years and older): 8 mg per day
- Women (ages 19-50): 18 mg per day
- Women (ages 19-50): 27 mg if pregnant and 9mg if breastfeeding.

| Iron-Rich Foods: Remission | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|---|
| mg of Iron | Serving Size | Food Item |
| 2 mg | 1 medium-sized | Baked Potato, with skin |
| 2 mg | 3 ounces | Beef |
| 2 mg | ¾ cup | Bran Flakes |
| 2 mg | ½ cup | Cream of Wheat |
| 2 mg | ½ cup | Dried Beans, cooked (kidney, lima, lentils, navy) |
| 2 mg | 4 pieces | Dried Prunes |
| 2 mg | ¾ cup | Oatmeal, fortifie |
| 2 mg | 3 ounces | Shrimp |
| 2 mg | 1 cup | Spinach |
| 2 mg | ½ cup | Soybeans |
| 2 mg | ½ cup | Tofu |
| 1 mg | 1 ounce | Cashews, Brazil Nuts and Walnuts |
| 1 mg | 3 ounces | Chicken |
| 1 mg | 7 halves | Dried Apricots |
| 1 mg | 1 cup | Kale, Cooked |
| 1 mg | 5 tablespoons | Raisins |
| 1 mg | 1 slice | Whole Wheat Bread |

| Suggestions for maintaining iron levels during a flare: |
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| Choose lean protein sources (fish, poultry, tofu). Animal sources are more easily absorbed. |
| Include foods rich in vitamin C (melons and tomatoes) with meals. Vitamin C helps the body more easily absorb plant sources of iron. |
| Consume enriched and fortified grains (white rice, white pasta, and white bread). |
| Limit decaf and regular coffee and tea at mealtimes, both decrease the absorption of iron. |
| Incorporate flare-friendly sources of iron from the chart below. |

| Iron-Rich Foods: Flare-Friendly | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| mg of Iron | Serving Size | Food Item |
| 2 mg | ¾ cup | Fortified Oatmeal |
| 2 mg | 3 ounces | Shrimp |
| 2 mg | ½ cup | Tofu |
| 1 mg | 1 ounce | Cashew Butter |
| 1 mg | 3 ounces | Chicken |

It's important to work with your doctor and share new symptoms you may be experiencing or if symptoms worsen. A registered dietitian can help review food intake and create personalized meal plans to meet your specific iron requirements.