Ideas for adding iron rich foods to your child’s diet

The comic hero Iron Man may have had a suit of iron, but even his parents probably needed to encourage iron intake. If you are picturing yourself chasing after cows with a fork in order to provide iron-rich foods to your kid, take heart. There are lots of foods which are rich in iron.

Aim for two iron-rich food servings per day.

Surprisingly it’s not meat but iron-fortified cereals that top the list for iron content per serving.

For babies

Serve oatmeal, rice, barley, or multigrain cereals from the “baby food” aisle: A serving of ¼ cup = 4 Tablespoons contains 60% of a baby’s daily iron requirements- 6.75mg of iron. Prepare the cereal using breast milk or formula for some added iron and other nutrients.

For older kids

Cheerios: 1 ½ cup = 70% Daily value (assuming a diet of 2000 cal/day) of iron 12.6mg iron

Quaker oatmeal squares: 1 cup contains 90% Daily value (assume 2000cal/day) or 16.6mg

Grape Nuts : ½ cup = 100% Daily value or 18mg iron per serving

Kellogg’s Frosted miniwheats, approx 25 squares = 100% or 18mg iron

If you give cereal, you can use Dr. Kardos’s rule for her own kids, as some iron-fortified cereals also contain too much sugar: if you choose a sweet cereal (more than 8g of sugar per serving), you must mix it half and half with a not-so-sweet

cereal.

Help your kids absorb the iron in their food

Assuming your kids drink cereal with milk, unfortunately calcium in milk inhibits iron absorption. You can change that by serving up some vitamin C containing fruit like strawberries with the cereal.

Be sure to read labels! Just the other day, Dr.Lai was dismayed to find her beloved brand of steel-cut oats, although high in fiber, has very little iron.

More iron-rich food suggestions

Beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, fish, shellfish- all contain iron. Drink water and not milk with a meat-containing meal to help your kids absorb the iron better. Also, serve a vitamin C containing fruit on the side, such as strawberries, melon, and oranges to boost your child's absorption of iron.

It is worth highlighting the current trend for teens, especially boys, to use protein powders. The problem, is that by using powders instead of eating meat, they miss out on eating a rich source of iron.

Vegetarian kid? Tofu, beans, eggs, fortified rice, spinach, kale, dried fruit all contain iron.

A comprehensive table of iron content in foods can be found here.

Do you have a picky eater who refuses all iron-rich foods? Ask your pediatrician to recommend an appropriate iron supplement. Iron is important for brain health as well as blood health.

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