

It's a common misconception that vegetarians will have problems with iron deficiency and anaemia. However, there is no evidence that vegetarians are any more likely to develop anaemia than non vegetarians.



Millions of vegetarians worldwide have lived perfectly normal lives, without the need for iron supplementation in any form and have, in fact, excelled professionally, academically and in sport!

There are plenty of sources of iron in a vegetarian or vegan diet. You can enhance your iron absorption by adding vitamin C with every meal.

Good vegetarian iron sources

- wholegrains (wholemeal bread, brown rice, quinoa)
- nuts
- dried fruits (raisins, dates, apricots)
- pumpkin and sunflower seeds
- basil, parsley (try basil pesto)
- lentils
- beans (baked beans!)
- split peas
- beansprouts
- fortified soya and rice milks
- tofu
- chocolate
- molasses
- green vegetables

Research has shown that in the average diet a significant proportion of iron is typically obtained from pasta, rice, cereals and breads.

Good sources of Vitamin C

- citrus fruits
- strawberries
- vegetables such as green peppers, tomatoes and cabbage.

Foods that inhibit iron absorption

Some foods should be avoided in large quantities, especially at meal times:

- tea and coffee (contain tannins)
- cocoa and spinach (contain oxalates – Popeye got it wrong!)
- whole grains and bran products (high in phytates)
- egg yolks (contain phosvitin)
- dairy products (calcium)

Handy tips

- have some citrus fruit or orange juice with your meal, or other foods rich in ascorbic acid (green pepper or cabbage).
- store vegetables in a cool, dark place. Buy fresh vegetables and eat them promptly.
- steam vegetables to retain as much of the nutrients as possible.
- drink tea between meals rather than during or straight after a meal
- don't sprinkle raw wheat bran on foods (inhibits absorption)

Recommended daily iron intakes

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Infants | <i>0-6 months</i> | <i>7-12 months</i> |
| Breastfed | 0.6 mg | 9.0 mg |
| Bottlefed | 3.0 mg | 9.0 mg |
| Children 1-11 years | 6-8 mg | |
| Teenagers 12-18 | 10-13 mg | |
| Women 19-54 years | 12-16 mg | |
| Pregnant (2 & 3 trimester) | +10-20 mg | |
| Women 54+ | 5-7 mg | |
| Men 19+ | 7 mg | |

Source: *Recommended Dietary Intakes for Use in Australia NHRMC 1991*. Endorsed for New Zealand. Extra care is required for women of childbearing age, pregnant women and babies (six to twelve months).

However, following a varied and nutritious vegetarian diet that includes good supplies of Vitamin C may be all that's required to stay healthy.

Supplements may be necessary during pregnancy – however, this is also common within the general population. Store tablets out of reach of children.

Too much of a good thing?

Consult your doctor before taking iron supplements
– recent studies have found links between excessive iron intake and heart disease.

We also have a resource pack on vegetarians and iron
– contact us if you'd like to know more.

Further information

Leaflet sets available from the NZ Vegetarian Society

Vegetarian families set

Reasons for vegetarianism set

Vegetarian nutrition set:

- Overview
- Iron
- Protein
- Vitamin B12
- Calcium and Vitamin D

Each set contains 5 information leaflets

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www.vegan.org.nz

www.vegansociety.com

www.vrg.org

www.viva.org.uk

Well planned vegan and other types of vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. From: *Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dieticians of Canada: Vegetarian Diets*. 2003. Endorsed by the New Zealand Dietetic Association.

This information was produced by the New Zealand Vegetarian Society.
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Iron The Vitamin C connection



VEGETARIAN NUTRITION



New Zealand Vegetarian Society