

Mineral Iron

Most iron in the body exists in the red blood cells followed next by the muscles. The iron-rich molecule in red blood cells is called hemoglobin and that in the muscles is called myoglobin. The red color of blood and muscles is because of hemoglobin and myoglobin. Every one gram of hemoglobin has about 3.3 mg of iron in it.

The body is very efficient in recycling iron. The life span of a red blood cell is about 3 months, and once these breaks down the iron in the hemoglobin molecule, gets recycled. The daily requirement of iron is small, 8-9 mg. Despite this minimal need, almost 80% of the Indian population suffers from iron deficiency anemia. An important reason is ignorance, regards proper nutrition.

Factors which reduce iron absorption in the body:

- Low gastric acidity – Taking the acid-reducing drug for stomach acid reflux is getting common amongst city dwellers. Low stomach acidity decreases the absorption of iron.
- Low intake of vitamin C – Vitamin C promotes absorption of iron in the digestive tract.
- Excessive tea and coffee – Excess caffeine can reduce iron absorption significantly. Avoid drinking caffeinated beverages with food.

How to improve iron intake

- Eat foods rich in iron such as – Lentils, Legumes, green leafy vegetables, millet, ragi, nuts, seeds, soybeans, dark dried grapes (dark raisins), and jaggery. Both raisins, as well as jaggery, are high glycemic, so do not over-consume.
- Use cast iron pots for cooking.
- Eat foods rich in vitamin C (Amla and citrus fruits-lemon, oranges, and other fresh fruits) and vitamin B complex (sprouted lentils and legumes). Sprouting /germinating process increases protein, vitamin, and mineral content of the seeds and grains by 30%. Cooking and drying of the fruits destroy vitamin C.

Iron deficiency anemia (hemoglobin less than 10gm/ 100ml blood) is common amongst Indians, especially amongst females. Anemia causes easy fatigability and shortness of breath. Treatment of anemia requires an oral iron supplement, but the long-term solution is to eat healthy nutritious natural foods rich in iron and vitamin C.