

# Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University



## *IRON: An Important Nutrient*

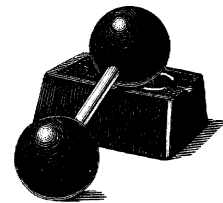
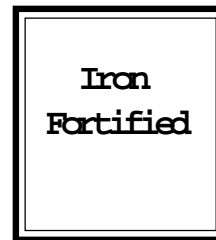
Why is iron such an important nutrient during pregnancy? Iron is needed for healthy blood. The iron in blood carries oxygen to your body, and to your baby's body. When you are pregnant, you have more blood in your body, so it is important that you also get more iron from your diet. In the last 3 months of pregnancy your baby is building up an iron store that will last 4-6 months after birth.

Your doctor will check your blood to see whether you have enough iron by measuring the hemoglobin in your red blood cells. Hemoglobin contains iron and carries oxygen throughout the body. If your hemoglobin levels are low, that means you may not be getting enough iron in your diet. This is called ANEMIA.

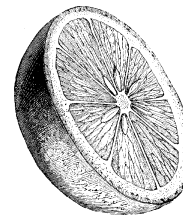
It's common for pregnant moms to have low levels of iron. So choosing foods that are good sources of iron is important. Foods high in iron include dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach, liver, meat, dried fruits, and legumes.

Try these ideas to help increase the iron level in your body:

- Eat peanut butter sandwiches with iron fortified bread.
- Eat stews and soups made with beans and meat, like chili.
- Use ground beef and turkey to make spaghetti sauce and taco filling.
- Eat cereal with iron added.



- Drink orange juice with your iron-fortified cereal. Vitamin C helps your body use iron more efficiently.



- Eat dried fruits like raisins and prunes as a snack.
- Try new recipes using liver (you might like it!)

Since it is hard to get all of the iron you need entirely from food, your doctor may recommend a prenatal supplement and/or an iron supplement.

### **Suggested Readings:**

Dairy Council of California (1990). *Pregnancy: A special time for nutrition and good health*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

March of Dimes (1992). *Eating for two: Nutrition during pregnancy information sheet*. White Plains, NY: Author.

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Alton, I., and Mulchahey, K. (1990). Nutrition-related special concerns of adolescent pregnancy. In M. Story (Ed.). *Nutrition management of the pregnant adolescent* (pp. 67-83). Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse.

Lambert-Lagace, Louise. (1991). *Feeding your baby: From conception to age two*. Chicago: Surrey Books.

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Viglietti, G., and Skinner, J. (1987). Estimation of iron bioavailability in adolescents' meals and snacks. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 87, 903-908.

Wekselman, Kathryn. (1995) Now you're really eating for two. *Child Birth Planner (1995 Edition)*, 18-19.



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