

What you need to know if your physician has recommended an extra iron supplement

Iron

Iron is a mineral that is stored primarily in your liver, but it's also stored in your bone marrow, spleen and muscles. Iron is essential because it helps your red blood cells (RBC) carry and deliver oxygen to other parts of your body, as well as aiding in energy production. Iron is another nutrient that pregnant women need more of. This is due to the increased volume of blood supply during pregnancy to accommodate a woman's unborn child. Women already have an increased need for iron because of menstrual periods; pregnancy just adds to this need.

Supplements

Depending upon the type of supplement you're considering, you may find iron (Slow Fe) and folic acid (Folate) in a multi-blend or as individual supplements. Almost any drug store or retail store will carry multivitamins, prenatal vitamins and individual supplements. It's very important that you do not rely on the supplement alone to supply your need for a particular vitamin or mineral as they are merely a supplement to your daily food intake. They are not meant to supply your daily needs on a regular basis. Supplements only help complete your daily recommended allowance if you do not get enough of them during the day.

Recommended Dosage

During normal pregnancy, the recommended intake of iron is 27 milligrams (mg) a day. Women between the ages of 19 and 50 who aren't pregnant need only 18 mg a day, and women age 51 and older and all adult men need around 8 mg a day.

- *If you have lower than normal blood counts or diagnosed with anemia, your physician may advise you to take additional iron supplements. The recommended dose for treatment is 60 to 120mg/day of elemental iron. Your physician will instruct you on the appropriate dose for your condition.*
- **Important Fact:** If you are instructed to add an iron supplement in addition to your prenatal vitamin, do not take them together; separate the doses for better absorption.
- There are several options for iron supplements that are sold over-the-counter. The preparation used should be based upon cost and effectiveness with minimal side effects.

- **Ferrous Sulfate:** Sold over-the-counter as Slow Fe, Slow Iron, or Fer-In-Sol

- Each 325mg tablet contains *65mg of elemental iron* – recommended treatment is one tablet once or twice daily depending on the physician's recommendations.



- **Ferrous Gluconate:** Sold over-the-counter as Ferate, Fergon, or Gentle Iron

- Each 240mg tablet contains *27mg of elemental iron* – recommended treatment is two to three times daily depending on the physician's recommendation.



- Ferrous Fumarate: Sold over-the-counter as Ferrimin, Ferrocite, Hemocyte, or Ferretts
 - Each preparation contains 33% of elemental iron – approximately *106mg of elemental iron* – recommended treatment is one tablet one or two times daily depending on the chosen preparation and the physician's recommendations.



Possible Side Effects of Supplements

Frequent gastrointestinal side effects range from mild to severe constipation (especially in pregnant women), nausea, diarrhea, metallic taste, and thick, green stool.

Do's and Don'ts While Taking Supplements

- Iron should not be taken with food because certain ingredients in foods can keep the iron from absorption.
- A number of other factors can inhibit the absorption of iron, including antacids, calcium supplements, and certain antibiotics. Iron should be taken two hours before, or four hours after taking antacids.



- Iron does not absorb as well when taken along with cereals, dietary fiber, tea, coffee, eggs, or milk.



- Only a small portion of supplements are absorbed so if you are placed on a higher dose you must separate the doses according to the directions.

- Iron is best taken with a half-glass of orange juice to enhance iron absorption.



- Please advise your physician if you are on seizure medication, diabetes medication, sleeping pills, or antibiotics because these types of medications can lower the amount of iron you absorb.

Diet

While you can take an iron supplement, it's always best to obtain nutrients from food. Include plenty of foods that offer these nutrients. Lean red meat, beans, and dark leafy vegetables are good sources of iron.