

Iron Requirements

Babies are born with a store of iron that lasts for their first six months. After this time they get small amounts from breast milk and formula, but the majority needs to come from food. Iron is vital for the formation of haemoglobin in blood, which transports oxygen to the cells to produce energy, and is also essential for the development of the nervous system (brain) and for strong immunity. A deficiency of iron can lead to anaemia, characterised by low energy levels, pale skin, slow growth and frequent illness. For information on food sources of iron, see Appendix 4 (page 147).

First Meats

Red meat is another good source of iron for your baby, who will need only small amounts (1–2 teaspoons) to begin with. Tips for preparing and serving first meats are given below:

- Remove small amounts of meat from the family meal before you add any seasonings, then mouli, pulverise in a food processor or chop finely and mix with puréed vegetables.
- Freeze lamb's liver or other cuts of meat. You can then grate off small amounts from the frozen block as needed and add them to raw vegetables before cooking. Note that liver should be served only once a week because it is high in vitamin A, which can be toxic in large quantities.
- Portion lamb or beef mince into 50g servings and freeze individually. Thaw as needed in the fridge or microwave and fry gently with diced or grated carrot, pumpkin or potato and frozen peas. The meat will release its juices and create a delicious gravy. Blend in a food processor or mouli to break up the meat if necessary.

Drinks

Babies aged seven to nine months continue to get most of their fluids from breast milk or formula, but they will need extra hydration between feeds, especially during the hotter summer months. Water is the perfect drink for babies, although until they reach the age of eight or nine months it should be boiled thoroughly first, to kill any bacteria, and cooled. Do not offer mineral water as it can be too rich in minerals for young kidneys to deal with. Always have a sipper bottle or double-handled mug available for your baby to drink from when he is thirsty.

Refrain from giving babies fruit juices until they are at least 12 months old, and even then dilute them with five parts water. Although the sugars juices contain are natural, they can feed bacteria in the mouth and hence contribute to tooth decay. Also encourage your child to drink out of a cup rather than a bottle. Drinking out of a bottle continually bathes teeth and gums in fluid, which in the case of formula and juices contain sugars. Babies who are left to sleep with a bottle in their mouth are thus particularly vulnerable to tooth decay, which can start as soon as teeth start to appear in the mouth.

Weak vegetable juices and smoothies made with breast milk, formula or water can be introduced from nine months. Flavoured milks and fizzy drinks should, however, be avoided as they are high in sugar and contain very little nutritional value. Cow's milk is not suitable as a drink until after 12 months, and then only full-fat milk should be offered until five years (see page 49).

RECIPES FOR BABIES AGED 7-9 MONTHS

Iron-rich Porridge

Dried fruit and oats are both rich in iron, while the vitamin C in the fruit also enhances iron absorption by the body. Note that dried fruits are often treated with preservatives to help them keep their colour. Because some babies may react to such additives, choose preservative-free dried fruits instead. Oats can be difficult to digest until babies are eight months old, so before this age use other iron-rich grains such ground millet or quinoa.

Preparation time 10 minutes

Cooking time 3–5 minutes

2 tsp finely chopped dried apricots, peaches, nectarines, sultanas or raisins

1/2 cup water

1 1/2 Tbsp rice cereal, quinoa flakes or oat cereal (from eight months)

Soak the dried fruit overnight in the water to soften, or simmer for 5 minutes before adding the cereal. Simmer the cereal and fruit for 3–5 minutes until thick, adding extra hot water if necessary. Thin with breast milk, formula or cooled boiled water, then purée or push through a coarse sieve. Alternatively, use fresh fruit, chop into small pieces and simmer with the oats.

