



## FEELING IRONED OUT?

Accredited practising dietitian and mum Vanessa Schuldts has many years experience advising in nutrition and health



**H**ave you been feeling as flat as a board lately? If you're seeking some more vitality, it may be time to up your iron intake.

Iron is an essential part of haemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of red blood cells, and its deficiency causes lethargy, paleness, breathlessness and poor concentration as the blood is unable to deliver sufficient oxygen to body cells. Being iron deficient also makes you more susceptible to infections because immune-function cells depend on iron to work effectively.

Iron requirements are higher for women (18mg per day) than for men (8mg per day) due to menstrual losses, and increase to 27mg per day when pregnant to provide for the growing foetus and increased blood volume. Surprisingly, the iron requirements of breastfeeding women (9mg per day) are substantially less. This is because menstruation, which reduces iron stores, typically does not resume until after six months of breastfeeding.

There are two types of iron. Haem iron is found in animal foods such as red and white meat and fish, and is readily absorbed by the body. The other is non-haem iron, present in non-meat sources such as vegetables, grainy breads, cereals, legumes, nuts and seeds. Non-haem iron is more poorly absorbed. To maximise your intake and absorption of iron, try putting these tips into practice:

- 1 Eat lean red meats such as beef and lamb three to four times per week. Have pork, poultry and fish on the other days.
- 2 Enjoy a variety of legumes (lentils, kidney beans, four-bean mix, baked beans), wholegrain breads, iron-enriched breakfast cereals, eggs, cashews, almonds and sesame seeds.
- 3 Include vitamin-C rich foods (citrus fruits, fruit juice, strawberries, kiwi fruit, rockmelon, capsicum and broccoli) with your meals, as they increase non-haem iron absorption.
- 4 Avoid drinking tea or coffee with meals, as they interfere with non-haem iron absorption. Enjoy your cuppa between meals.
- 5 If vegetarian, routinely practise tips two to four. Iron supplements will most likely be required if pregnant.

If you suspect you're iron deficient, see your doctor for a full iron blood screen, as iron-deficiency anaemia usually requires supplementation. Low-dose iron supplements tend to have fewer side effects (such as constipation) than high-dose ones and ferrous gluconate appears to be less irritating than other forms of iron supplement. Be guided by your doctor or dietitian's advice.

Poise  
Strength  
Flexibility

- Pregnancy and post pregnancy
- Mums and bubs classes
- Group exercise classes
- Private and semi private classes
- Certified instructor training programmes
- Specialising in rehabilitation