Our bodies need good levels of iron to work properly and to feel our best. Low levels of iron is called iron deficiency. This handout will explain the importance of iron and how to keep iron levels up through diet. It will also explain that some people could need a multivitamin with iron in addition to an iron-rich diet to keep their iron levels up.

**WHAT IS IRON?**

Iron is a mineral in food that has many important jobs in the body:

- Helps with **metabolism** (how our bodies use food for energy)
- Helps our brains develop and grow over time
- Carry oxygen to all parts of our bodies
- Provide our bodies with energy and fuel our brains

**WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF IRON?**

There are 2 types of iron:

- **Heme iron** is found in meats and other animal sources
- **Non-heme iron** is found in plants and **iron-fortified foods** (foods with iron added). Foods rich in vitamin C rich can help boost how much iron our bodies absorb from plant sources. Calcium-rich foods (like milk and yogurt) can lower how much iron our bodies absorb. Do not take iron supplements with dairy products. Ask a Registered Dietitian how much dairy is right for people with Down syndrome.

**WHAT IS IRON DEFICIENCY?**

**Iron deficiency (ID)** occurs when low iron levels cause the body to not make enough red blood cells to carry oxygen to all the body’s tissues. It can lead to anemia but is not the same as iron deficiency anemia (IDA).

ID is more likely to affect people who have disabilities, such as those with Down syndrome.

Sometimes, people with Down syndrome have **feeding difficulties** (challenges with eating or with certain tastes, textures or types of food). Feeding difficulties can make it challenging for people with Down syndrome to get enough iron in their diet.

**WHICH FOODS ARE GREAT SOURCES OF IRON?**

There are many types of foods that are great sources of iron. Iron can be found in a lot of different vegetables, fruits, meats and grains, so there plenty of options for everyone. A **nutrition facts label** can show you how much iron is in each serving of a food.

Great sources of iron include:

- Red meat, pork and poultry
- Seafood
- Beans, such as kidney beans, black beans, black eyed peas
- Dark green leafy vegetables, like spinach
- Dried fruits, such as raisins or apricots
- Iron-fortified cereals, breads and pastas
- Pumpkin seeds and pumpkin butter
- Lentils

---

*Did You Know…?*

Iron supplements or eating lots of iron can cause constipation. If a person goes more than 3 days without a bowel movement, they should talk to the doctor about how to help soften their bowels.

*Iron-rich food ideas on the back!*
SHOULD PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME TAKE AN IRON SUPPLEMENT?

In addition to diet, the care team might recommend an iron supplement or a multivitamin that has 100% of the Daily Recommend Value (DRV) of iron. A DRV is a number that tells people how much of a certain nutrient they need. DRVs are listed on nutrition labels as a percent (%) to show you how much of a certain nutrient is in that food or supplement. Look for supplements that have 100% of the DRV of iron.

If iron deficiency worsens to become iron deficiency anemia (IDA), the care team can prescribe an iron supplement and update the care plan.

**Vitamin C and Iron: Working Together to Keep You Growing!**

Vitamin C helps our bodies absorb more iron from food. When picking out something to eat, choose foods that have vitamin C to maximize how much iron you are getting.

Foods with lots of vitamin C include:
- Citrus fruits such as oranges and grapefruits
- Broccoli
- Bell peppers
- Strawberries
- Tomatoes
- Melons
- Leafy greens

**Multivitamins with Iron**

To boost iron levels, follow the directions on the vitamin or supplement label.

**Hard Chewables:**
- Flintstones® Hard Chewables with Iron (18mg per tablet)
- Renzo’s® Hard Chewable Multivitamin (18mg per 3 tablets)

**Gummies:**
- Vitamin Friends® Vegan Iron Gummy (5mg per gummy)

**Pill:**
- Nature Made® Multi Complete (18mg per tablet)

**Liquids:**
- Zarbee’s® Baby Multivitamin with Iron (10mg per 2mL)
- NovaFerrum® Iron Multivitamin Infants (10mg per 1mL)
- Enfamil® Poly-Vi Sol with Iron (10mg per 1mL)

**Melts:**
- EZ Melts® Multivitamin (18mg per 2 tablets)