Balancing the supply and demand for iron in your body is important to maintain good health. Normally your iron levels remain in balance, with iron from your diet replacing the iron stores used up by your body.1 The iron in your food is absorbed into the bloodstream in your small intestine.1 The supply and demand for iron in your body can become unbalanced for a number of reasons and this can lead to iron deficiency.2

**A DECREASED SUPPLY OF IRON TO YOUR BODY CAN BE CAUSED BY...**

A lack of iron in your diet. Iron can be found in both animal products and plant foods. Iron from animal products (known as non-haem iron) is better absorbed by your body than iron from plant foods (known as non-haem iron).2 If you are vegetarian or vegan it is more likely that you will not be getting enough iron.2 Choosing what you eat wisely can help to keep your iron levels up.

Iron from your food not being absorbed properly in your small intestine. If you have Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis) or coeliac disease, then the lining of your small intestine may be inflamed. This means that less iron can be absorbed from your food into your bloodstream.2

**AN INCREASED DEMAND FOR IRON MAY BE CAUSED BY...**

Blood loss, for example as a result of:
- Heavy periods2
- Internal bleeding from your gut (gastro-intestinal bleeding)2
- Frequent blood donation2
- Traumatic injuries/accidents10
- Surgery2

Increased demand for red blood cells or oxygen in your body, for example as a result of:
- Intense exercise5
- Growth and development in children and adolescents1
- Pregnancy7

Chronic inflammation in diseases such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease or Rheumatoid Arthritis. If you have a condition that involves chronic inflammation, your immune system can block the release of iron from your body’s iron stores, reducing the amount of iron available to make red blood cells.12

Other medical conditions and/or therapies, such as haemodialysis for patients with kidney disease.

If you are not getting enough iron, for any reason, you might find yourself lacking in energy and feeling exhausted day after day. While there are other symptoms of iron deficiency, extreme tiredness or fatigue is often reported by patients.3

Find out whether you are feeling more than just tired...

See our Are You At Risk? section to find out if you are at risk of iron deficiency due to another health condition.

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