

How to Include Iron-rich Foods in the Infant Diet

Why is Iron Important?¹⁻⁴



Supports growth, brain development, and red blood cell production

After 6 months, breast milk alone doesn't meet iron needs

WHO recommends iron-rich complementary foods from 6 months to prevent deficiency

Iron-rich Food Sources⁴⁻⁶



Animal-based (Heme Iron - better absorbed): red meat, fish, liver, egg yolk

Plant-based (Non-heme Iron): lentils (masoor dal), chickpeas (chana), green leafy vegetable, finger millet (ragi/nachni), fortified cereals, etc.

Boosting Iron Absorption⁶⁻⁸



Pair non-heme iron foods with **Vitamin C sources** (e.g., tomato, lemon) to enhance absorption

Prebiotics (e.g., citrus fruits, banana, apple) help maintain gut health and support iron uptake

Practical Indian Food Combinations⁵



Masoor dal and oats cheela + Tomato chutney



Oatmeal + Mashed banana + Strawberry



Drumstick leaves (Moringa) with moong dal soup + Lemon juice



Palak and methi* roti + curd



Palak and moong dal khichdi



Carrot, apple and moong dal soup



Ragi/nachni and banana porridge

Providing iron-rich complementary feeds from 6 months of age is essential to support optimal infant growth and development.^{1,3,4} Vitamin C and prebiotic-rich foods can enhance iron absorption and gastrointestinal health.⁶⁻⁸

WHO: World Health Organization.
*pureed and mixed with wheat flour.
References: 1. Finn K, Callen C, Bhatia J, et al. Importance of Dietary Sources of Iron in Infants and Toddlers: Lessons from the FITS Study. *Nutrients*. 2017;9(7):733. 2. Health Canada. Nutrition for healthy term infants: recommendations from six to 24 months. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/resources/nutrition-healthy-term-infants/nutrition-healthy-term-infants-recommendations-birth-six-months/6-24-months.html>. Updated 21st July 2020. Accessed on: 2nd July 2025. 3. WHO Guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6–23 months of age. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/5abca011-4db2-4cf1-b959-45b756f7b600/content>. Accessed on: 5th November 2025. 4. National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements. Iron: Fact Sheet for Health Professionals. Updated 26th March 2021. Available at: <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional/>. Accessed on: 28th June 2025. 5. ICMR, NIN. Indian Food Composition Tables 2017. Available at: <https://www.nin.res.in/ebooks/IFCT2017.pdf>. Accessed on 5th November 2025. 6. CDC. Infant and Toddler Nutrition. Iron. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/iron.html>. Accessed on: 5th November 2025. 7. Maqsood S, Arshad MT, Ikram A, et al. Fruit-Based Diet and Gut Health: A Review. *Food Sci Nutr*. 2025;13(5):e70159. 8. Husmann FMD, Zimmermann MB, Herter-Aeberli I. The Effect of Prebiotics on Human Iron Absorption: A Review. *Adv Nutr*. 2022;13(6):2296-2304.