

# Lunch at the Library's HEALTH TIP OF THE WEEK



This healthy tip of the week was adapted from "KidsHealth from Nemours," [kidshealth.org/en/parents/strong-bones.html](http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/strong-bones.html). For more tips, visit [kernlibrary.org](http://kernlibrary.org) or [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org).

## Iron

### What Is Iron?

Iron is a mineral found in plants and animals and all living things. It's an important component of hemoglobin, the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to the body. Iron gives hemoglobin the strength to "carry" (bind to) oxygen in the blood, so oxygen gets to where it needs to go. Without enough iron, the body can't make hemoglobin and makes fewer red blood cells. This means tissues and organs won't get the oxygen they need. People can get iron by eating foods like meat and dark green leafy vegetables. Iron is also added to some foods, such as infant formula and cereals.

### What's Iron Deficiency?

Iron deficiency is when a person's body doesn't have enough iron. It can be a problem for some kids, particularly toddlers and teens (especially girls who have very heavy periods). In fact, many teenage girls are at risk for iron deficiency — even if they have normal periods — if their diets don't contain enough iron to offset the loss of blood during menstruation. After 12 months of age, toddlers are at risk for iron deficiency because they no longer drink iron-fortified formula — and, they may not be eating enough iron-containing foods to make up the difference. Iron deficiency can affect growth and may lead to learning and behavioral problems. If iron deficiency isn't corrected, it can lead to iron-deficiency anemia (a decrease in the number of red blood cells in the body).

### How Can I Help My Child Get Enough Iron?

Kids and teens should know that iron is an important part of a healthy diet. Foods rich in iron include: beef, pork, poultry, and seafood, tofu, dried beans and peas, dried fruits leafy dark green vegetables, iron-fortified breakfast cereals, breads, and pastas. To help make sure kids get enough iron: Serve iron-rich foods alongside foods containing vitamin C (such as tomatoes, broccoli, oranges, and strawberries). Vitamin C improves the way the body absorbs iron.



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