

## **The Lowdown on Iron**

Although iron is essential for the functioning of all organs, it is especially important for hemoglobin, the substance in red blood cells that helps with the circulation of oxygen throughout the body. Some signs of inadequate levels of iron could be irritability, slow growth, reduced appetite, fatigue and paleness. So, iron is important but how do you make sure that your baby gets enough?

While in the mother's womb, a baby gets lots of iron from the mother which is then stored in the baby's tissues and hemoglobin. In the first few months after birth as the baby grows these iron reserves get depleted and must be replaced through diet. Breastfed babies continue to get iron from the mother in her breast milk. This is an especially important source of iron for babies as the iron in breast milk is more readily absorbed than iron from other sources such as formula.

As a baby is weaned and solid foods are introduced, other sources of iron become essential. Iron fortified cereals and other iron rich foods such as dark green leafy vegetables as well as some grains need to become an important part of a baby's diet. An important aspect of iron absorption relates to the nutrient interactions that occur when combining different foods. Some nutrients can significantly increase iron absorption while others can hinder iron absorption. For example, the vitamin C found in orange juice, when consumed with a meal can double the amount of iron absorbed while milk with a meal can decrease iron absorption. An excellent combination for babies is iron-fortified cereal or grains high in iron eaten in combination with fruit. Here the vitamin C in the fruit ensures maximum absorption of the iron from the cereal. The following recipe uses this principle for better iron absorption:

Recipe (suitable for 7+ Months)

## **Quinoa and Apple**

(Quinoa is a grain that is an excellent source of protein, calcium and iron. The vitamin C from the apples helps with the iron absorption.)

2 apples

1/2 cup quinoa

1 1/2 cups water

Peel, core and dice apples and cook with ½ cup water until easily mashed. Wash and rinse quinoa (this is important as quinoa has a bitter coating), and cook with 1 cup water for about 10-15 minutes. Combine cooked quinoa and cooked apple. Mash or puree to desired consistency (add boiled water if necessary), taste and serve. Leftovers can easily be poured into ice cube trays, covered and frozen. Frozen cubes can then be emptied into an air tight container and kept in the freezer for up to 3 months.

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