

Improve Your Iron

Low iron is one of the most common reasons women feel tired, foggy, and worn down. It is also one of the most fixable, once you know how it gets tested and what it takes to absorb it.

1. Start with labs

- **Iron and TIBC:** how much iron is circulating, and how much capacity you have to carry it.
- **Ferritin:** your iron storage, and usually the first number to drop.
- **CBC:** whether low iron has started to affect your red blood cells.
- **CRP:** a marker of inflammation. High inflammation can falsely raise ferritin, so a normal ferritin can hide a real deficiency.
- **Cost:** your MD or NP can order these, usually covered in Ontario.

2. Know your iron types

- **Heme iron** is animal based and the most absorbable form. Beef liver supplements are a concentrated source.
- **Non-heme iron** is plant based, and the form used in most elemental supplements. Lower bioavailability, so it needs more help to absorb.
- **Vitamin C helps both.** A squeeze of citrus, half a bell pepper, or a small glass of orange juice alongside your dose.

3. How to take your supplement

- **Every other day** is often better absorbed than daily dosing, and it is gentler on your stomach.
- **On a fairly empty stomach.** One hour before a meal, or two hours after one.
- **If it upsets your stomach,** take it with a light snack rather than a full meal.
- **Stools may darken.** That is normal and not a cause for concern.

4. Keep these away from the dose

Dairy

Coffee

Tea

High-fibre foods

Calcium supplements

Antacids

- These bind iron in your gut and cut how much of it you actually absorb. Leave one to two hours on either side of your dose.

5. Give it time, then retest

- **Recheck in about three months.** Energy often turns around well before ferritin does, so retest before you decide you are done.
- **Ask why it dropped.** Heavy periods, low stomach acid, celiac disease, and not eating much iron are the usual reasons. Replacing iron without answering that tends to land you back here.

Where the dose fits into your day



Meal or coffee

Also dairy, tea, calcium

at least 2 hours



Iron + vitamin C

On a fairly empty stomach

at least 1 hour



Meal or coffee

Also dairy, tea, calcium

Heme sources

Animal based, and the better absorbed of the two

Beef · Lamb · Chicken thighs · Turkey · Liver · Oysters · Clams · Sardines

Non-heme sources

Plant based, so pair them with vitamin C

Lentils · Chickpeas · Black beans · Tofu · Pumpkin seeds · Spinach · Quinoa · Swiss chard

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