

In Good Health

Iron Deficiency

Iron is an important dietary mineral which helps cells use oxygen efficiently in order to function properly. It is essential for energy production and maintaining a healthy immune system to fight infection.



Iron deficiency occurs when your body's iron needs are not met by iron absorption from your diet and can cause the following symptoms:

- Tiredness
- Fatigue
- Impaired concentration
- Decreased immunity

If a person is iron deficient for a long period of time they may develop iron deficiency anaemia, a serious condition where red blood cell production falls significantly, decreasing the transportation of oxygen throughout the body.

Iron deficiency is a common health problem which can occur at any time in a person's life, but those most at risk include children, teenagers (especially girls), athletes, and pregnant and breastfeeding women. These groups are most commonly affected because of the high levels of iron needed for growth, exercise, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Common causes of iron deficiency include: inadequate dietary intake of iron, chronic blood loss, and times of increased need e.g. during pregnancy. If you are iron deficient your doctor may recommend building some of the following iron-rich foods into your diet:

- Wholegrain cereals, breads and pastas
- Meat, poultry and fish
- Dark green, leafy vegetables such as spinach and broccoli



- Raisins, nuts, seeds and beans
- Liver (although pregnant women should avoid this as it may have a detrimental effect on foetal growth)

It is very important to talk to your doctor if you think you may be suffering from iron deficiency, as although it may simply be a problem with your diet, it can sometimes indicate a more serious underlying condition. You should not take iron supplements unless advised by your doctor as iron is toxic in large amounts and can be fatal in high doses.



Alcohol

What does it do to your body?

Alcohol is a depressant drug that slows down the activity of the central nervous system, reducing the speed of messages transmitted between the brain and the body.

Alcoholic beverages are drunk by many Australians for enjoyment and relaxation and when consumed in moderation, they cause few harmful effects. Anyone who drinks heavily or drinks too much in one session however, is at risk of experiencing both short and long-term harmful effects.

EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

The effects of alcohol vary from person to person and can depend on a number of factors including:

- The type and quantity of alcohol consumed
- The age, weight and gender of a person
- How much food is in the stomach
- Body chemistry
- The environment where the drinking is taking place

POSSIBLE SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

- Feeling more relaxed and confident with fewer inhibitions
- Impaired concentration and coordination
- Slower reflexes
- Slurred speech, blurred vision
- Unstable emotions
- Nausea, vomiting
- Memory loss
- Coma or death

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Heavy consumption of alcohol over a long period of time can cause serious, permanent damage to many parts of the body including the heart, brain, liver and digestive system. Other effects may include:

- High blood pressure and stroke
- Sexual impotence and reduced fertility
- Increased risk of breast cancer
- Sleeping difficulties
- Concentration and memory problems
- Negative impact on relationships, finances and work
- Legal problems

ALCOHOL INTAKE GUIDELINES

The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommend the following guidelines for alcohol intake:

- **Adult men and women** – should drink no more than two standard drinks per day to reduce the long-term harmful effects of alcohol. No more than four standard drinks should be consumed on any one occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury.
- **Children and young people under 18 years** – should not drink any alcohol.
- **Women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or breastfeeding** – should not drink any alcohol.

Tips for Drinking Responsibly

- Eat food before and during drinking to slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream
- Avoid salty snacks such as crisps and nuts which increase your thirst making you drink more
- Alternate every second or third alcoholic drink with water or a non-alcoholic drink
- Try lower alcoholic drinks such as light beer or low-alcohol wine
- Drink slowly – keep a steady pace while you are drinking as it can take time for alcohol to take its effect



The Australian standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol. A serving of alcohol often differs from a 'standard drink' however, and can often be much larger. For example, a standard drink of wine is equivalent to 100ml of wine, whereas a typical serve can be anywhere from 150 – 200ml. In Australia the labels on alcoholic drink bottles and cans are required to show the number of standard drinks they contain.

Blood Pressure



Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood as it is pumped around the body by the heart. This pressure does not always stay at the same level as it is constantly adapting to meet the body's needs. If blood pressure remains at a high level for long periods of time however, it can lead to serious health problems such as heart attack, stroke, kidney disease or heart failure.

Many people are unaware that they have high blood pressure as it does not usually give any warning signs. It is therefore important that you have your blood pressure checked regularly by a doctor, especially if you smoke, are overweight, have diabetes or have high blood cholesterol.

BLOOD PRESSURE GUIDELINES

Blood pressure is usually measured using an instrument called a sphygmomanometer and is recorded as two numbers such as 120/80. The higher number shows the pressure in the arteries as the heart squeezes blood out during each beat (systolic blood pressure), and the lower number shows the pressure as the heart relaxes before the next beat (diastolic blood pressure). The National Heart Foundation of Australia recommends the following figures as a useful guide for blood pressure levels:

- Normal Blood Pressure – less than 120/80
- Normal to High Blood Pressure – between 120/80 and 140/90
- High Blood Pressure – 140/90 or higher
- Very High Blood Pressure – 180/110 or higher

LOWERING BLOOD PRESSURE

Suggestions for lowering blood pressure include:

- Not smoking
- Reducing alcohol intake
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight
- Being physically active
- Reducing salt intake
- Taking medication if prescribed by your doctor

For more information visit The National Heart Foundation of Australia Website at www.heartfoundation.org.au

Healthy Holiday Habits

The holiday season is fast approaching which is often the hardest time to maintain a healthy lifestyle. We are constantly tempted by delicious foods and tend to do less exercise because we are so busy organising and attending celebrations. The tips below suggest ways to enjoy the festivities and good company, while staying healthy at the same time:

- Eat a light, healthy meal before attending a holiday gathering so you will be less tempted to overindulge in unhealthy buffet snacks.
- Allow yourself the occasional small treat – if you deprive yourself completely, you may end up bingeing later on.
- Fill your plate with healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables first, so that there is less room for foods that are higher in fat and sugar.
- Enjoy alcohol in moderation and choose drinks that have fewer calories such as spirits with diet mixers and white wine with soda.
- Drink plenty of water, especially if you are drinking alcohol - it is a good idea to alternate every alcoholic drink with a glass of water or non-alcoholic drink.
- Set aside time to exercise each day, such as organising a brisk walk with your family, a swim at the beach, or ball games in the park.
- Take time to relax, the holiday season can be a stressful time if you don't allocate time for yourself to unwind.



What is Flexibility?

Flexibility is the ability to move joints through their complete range of motion.

The flexibility of a joint can depend on a number of factors including the structure of the joint, and the elasticity of the muscles, ligaments or skin surrounding a joint.

Reduced flexibility can be genetic but can also be improved by performing stretching exercises.



Stretching

Benefits of stretching:

- Increased range of movement in the joints
- Improved circulation of the blood
- Enhanced muscular coordination
- Reduced muscle tension

Daily stretching exercises

Below are three stretching exercises that can be performed daily which should help improve the flexibility of your back, hips and shoulders. To avoid injury it is important to warm up the body before performing stretching exercises – partake in some light aerobic exercise to raise your temperature and increase circulation before you start, and begin stretching very gently.

1. Interlace fingers and turn palms outwards. Extend arms in front at shoulder height. Hold for 10-15 seconds, relax and repeat.
2. Stand with hands on hips and knees slightly flexed. Gently twist torso at the waist until the stretch is felt. Hold for 10-15 seconds and repeat on other side.
3. Sit on floor with left leg straight out in front. Bend right leg, cross right foot over and place outside left knee. Bend left elbow and rest to the right of right knee. Place right hand behind hip on floor, turn head over right shoulder and rotate the upper body to the right. Hold for 10-15 seconds and repeat on other side.

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer occurs when the cells of the skin are damaged. The main cause of damage to the skin cells is by over-exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. There are three types of skin cancer which are named after the type of cell they develop in:

1. Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)
2. Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)
3. Melanoma

BCC and SCC are the most common types of skin cancer and are often called non-melanoma cancers. Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer which if left untreated, can spread to other parts of the body and is very difficult to cure.

Checking for skin cancer

Early detection of skin cancer is critical as the majority of skin cancers are treatable if detected in their early stages. You should check your skin regularly for any changes that might suggest a skin cancer. You should look for:

- Any new spots, moles or freckles
- Spots, moles or freckles that have changed in colour, shape or size
- Any crusty, non-healing sores

If you notice any unusual changes on your skin you should see your doctor immediately to get them checked for skin cancer.

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