

How to Include Iron Containing Foods on the Menu

The *Nutrition Checklist for Menu Planning*¹ recommends on each day that a:

- **red meat** meal is served, at least **1** other iron containing food is included on the menu.
- **white meat or non-meat** meal is served, at least **2** other ironing containing foods are included on the menu.

The *Nutrition Checklist for Planning Sandwich Menus*² also recommends at least **2** iron containing foods are included on the menu, in addition to the main meal sandwiches.

These iron containing foods are **in addition** to the red meat, white meat or non-meat protein source (e.g. legumes, tofu) provided at the main meal.

Iron

Children have high iron requirements. Iron is needed for healthy blood, normal brain development and function, and a strong immune system.

Iron from animal sources such as red meats (beef, lamb, kangaroo) and white meats (pork, veal, chicken and fish) is well absorbed by the body.

Iron from plant foods is not absorbed as well as the iron from animal foods however plant foods can contribute to a child's daily iron intake. These iron containing foods include:

- Wholemeal/wholegrain breads
- Wholemeal pasta
- Breakfast cereals with added iron
- Dried fruit (apricots, dates, sultanas)
- Wholemeal flour or wheat germ in baked products (at least half the flour needs to be wholemeal)
- Legumes e.g. chickpeas, red kidney beans, butter beans, lentils, soybeans, baked beans
- English spinach, bok choy, broccoli and green peas

Menu ideas

Try including some of these ideas on your menu when extra iron containing foods are needed:

Main meal:

- When pasta or flour is an ingredient in a main meal dish, use wholemeal products.
- Serve wholemeal pasta or a variety of wholegrain breads as a side dish.
- Examples
 - Fruity Island Curry* served with wholemeal pasta
 - Zucchini Slice* served with multigrain bread
 - Lentil Soup* served with a small wholemeal bread roll
 - Tuna Mornay* served with wholemeal pasta
 - Vegetable Slice* served with a three bean salad
 - Lamb Burger* served on a wholemeal bun

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Morning or afternoon tea:

- wholemeal English muffins with spread
- dried fruit, cheese and wholegrain crackers
- wholemeal cheese scones
- wholemeal savoury muffins e.g. pumpkin, grated carrot and cheese
- hommus dip, vegetable sticks and wholemeal pita bread
- raisin toast with ricotta cheese spread
- breakfast cereals as a dry snack e.g. Cheerios™, Sultana Buds™, Weetbix Bites™
- wholemeal or wholegrain toast with baked beans
- iron enriched bread pinwheels with cottage cheese or hommus & grated carrot filling
- wholemeal pikelets and fruit
- Weetbix™ slice*
- vegetable & legume soup
- wholemeal tortilla bread chips and Mexican bean dip
- wholemeal banana muffins
- natural muesli with dried fruit and yoghurt
- wholemeal bread baked bean sandwiches
- mini pizza using wholemeal English muffin for base
- date loaf and vegetable sticks
- melted cheese fingers on wholegrain bread
- wholemeal crumpets with fruit and vegetable platter

Providing iron containing foods on the menu at morning and afternoon tea is especially important when the main meal is a non-meat, light or white meat dish, or sandwich meal.

* Recipes available in *Caring for Children: Birth to 5 years*, NSW Ministry of Health, 2014

1 *Caring for Children: Birth to 5 years*, NSW Ministry of Health, 2014, page 92.

2 *Caring for Children: Birth to 5 years*, NSW Ministry of Health, 2014, page 101.

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