What you really need to know about iron within a healthy diet.

sma Progress
A guide to the importance of iron and how to provide it.
For babies and toddlers from 6 months to 2 years.
Helping you understand your baby’s diet.

Between the ages of 6 months and two years, a baby’s nutritional needs are quite different to those of older children and adults. So this booklet has been designed to help you understand these needs, as well as offering practical advice on how to meet them.

In particular we focus on iron, an essential nutrient for both you and your baby, as well as the other vitamins and minerals important for your baby’s healthy growth. Although all these things are usually obtained by giving your baby a varied diet, sometimes it’s difficult to guarantee the correct balance. Here you’ll find hints and tips on how to provide the balanced diet, and how a follow-on milk like SMA PROGRESS can help too.

In an effort to constantly improve the quality of the booklets and information we offer to mums and dads, your feedback is greatly appreciated. If you have any tips you think other parents would find useful, or comments on how we could improve this booklet, you can write to us or ring the SMA Careline. To all those who’ve already done so, and whose comments we’ve tried to incorporate in this booklet, we’d like to say thank you.
Q. Why is iron important for my baby?
A. Iron helps your baby to grow and develop.
It is used by the body for both physical and brain development.

Q. What will happen if my baby doesn’t get enough iron?
A. She may become iron deficient or anaemic.
A short term lack of iron in your baby’s diet could lead to her becoming iron deficient. If this deficiency were prolonged, it could result in her becoming anaemic.

Q. What is iron deficiency?
A. Iron deficiency is a shortfall in the supply of iron required for healthy growth and development.
It is when the body has no available stores of iron left, and is not receiving enough in the diet to supply the body tissues with sufficient iron for growth and normal function.

Q. What is anaemia and is it different to iron deficiency?
A. Yes, anaemia is a more serious condition than iron deficiency.
Anaemia occurs when the body does not have enough iron to make normal red blood cells. Iron is needed to produce haemoglobin, which gives blood its red colour, and also for optimum brain development.

Q. How common is iron deficiency in babies and toddlers?
A. Unfortunately, it is very common.
Iron deficiency is probably the most common nutritional problem in the western world.
Surveys have shown that 21% of babies in the range of 10-12 months have daily intakes of iron below the desired level, and that 1 in 8 toddlers in the 18 to 30 month age group suffer from anaemia.

Q. How can I tell if my baby’s iron deficient or anaemic?
A. Your baby may seem to be more irritable than usual, tired, pale or suffer from a loss of appetite.
Iron deficiency is harder to detect than anaemia. Your baby may just consistently seem to be a little bit under the weather. It can also lead to a slowing down of her growth and development.

A prolonged lack of iron could lead to anaemia and your baby may become tired, pale, irritable and lose her appetite.

If you have concerns then arrange a visit to your healthcare professional who can test your baby’s blood.

1MAFF Food and Nutrient Intakes of British Infants Aged 6-12 Months survey (1992)
Q. How can I prevent my baby from becoming iron deficient?

A. Make sure you give her a diet containing good sources of iron that can be easily absorbed.

It is important to ensure that your baby is receiving a balanced diet with enough iron for her needs.

In this booklet you will find information on how much iron your baby needs, the iron content of some common foods and some useful tips on helping make sure your baby can absorb the iron you are giving her.

Q. Is all the iron contained in my baby’s diet absorbed?

A. Not necessarily; the type of iron in some foods is more easily absorbed than in others.

Haem iron, which is contained in meat, is more easily absorbed than non-haem iron, which is found in fruit and green vegetables. Your baby’s ability to absorb iron is also affected by the level of iron in her body store. She will only absorb the iron she needs.

You can help ensure your baby is absorbing iron efficiently by following a few handy tips:

Tip 1
Vitamin C increases the amount of iron your baby absorbs, so try and incorporate diluted fruit juice (e.g. one part pure juice and three parts water) or vegetables into your baby’s meal.

As your baby gets older, give fruit such as an orange as a finger food dessert.

N.B. remove any pips first to avoid the risk of choking.

Tip 2
Never give your baby unprocessed bran and only give her moderate amounts of high fibre cereals. Some high fibre foods contain substances which reduce iron absorption. They are also very filling so your baby may fill up on these and not be able to eat other foods which contain important nutrients. However, foods such as fine grain wholemeal bread are suitable for your baby in moderation.

Tip 3
Never give your baby tea or coffee as they reduce iron absorption. Alternatives that could be given are cooled, boiled water, baby’s usual milk or diluted pure fruit juice (see tip 1). N.B. Juice should only be given at mealtimes.
Q. How much iron does my baby need and does she need more as she gets older?

A. Babies between 7 and 12 months grow very rapidly which means they need more iron than a child aged 1 to 3.

Babies are born with a store of iron provided by your diet during pregnancy. By the time they reach 6 months this natural reserve is running out and iron needs to be provided in your baby’s diet.

To help you monitor your baby’s iron intake, we have developed an easy to follow point system similar to the calorie counting system most of us have encountered at some time.

The chart below gives a general guide to the daily number of points your baby needs for her age range.

| Babies aged 7 - 12 months | 26 points |
| Daily Points*** | 7.5mg of iron |
| Young children aged 1-3 years | 23 points |
| 6.5mg of iron |

On pages 13 to 17 you will find common foods which you may give to your baby and to which we have assigned points according to the level of iron in each food.

Some days your baby may not finish all of her food and so will not have had the number of points needed – don’t worry – you can make this up over the next few days.

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Q. Is milk still important once weaning has started?

A. Yes, milk is still very important. You should give your baby a pint of milk a day until she is five years old.

Healthcare professionals recommend that once your baby has started weaning you should continue with breast milk, baby milk or a follow-on milk from 6 months, which will help meet your baby’s iron needs.

Breast Milk

Although breast milk only contains a small amount of iron, it is easily absorbed and provides sufficient iron for a young baby up to the age of six months. However, it may not provide all of the iron needed by an older baby.

Infant Milks and Follow-On Milks

These milks are iron enriched. Follow-on milks in particular, like PROGRESS*, are specially formulated for babies from 6 months to 2 years and can be used as part of a mixed diet. They contain higher levels of iron to meet the increased needs your baby has from 6 months onwards.

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*One iron point is equivalent to 0.5mg of iron.
***Taken from the DHF report on Health and Social Subjects No. 41 Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom 1991.