

[IMAGE]

Strike While the Iron Is Hot

Iron-deficiency anemia in infants, a condition caused by inadequate levels of iron in the body, was recently covered in a review in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. Our bodies require iron to make hemoglobin, a part of the red blood cells that carry oxygen throughout the body. If iron levels get too low, an adult might experience fatigue; headaches; dizziness; concentration problems; a pale appearance; and brittle nails and cracked lips. Although few adults in developed nations suffer from this form of anemia, infants are more commonly affected.

In a healthy infant's first months outside the womb, breastfeeding does not provide adequate iron, so iron stored in the liver and bone marrow is utilized. However, by around six months of age, these stores are depleted. Premature birth; prolonged and excessive breastfeeding; providing the wrong types of complementary foods; and frequent infections can all lead to iron deficiency in infants. In children and adolescents, it usually occurs in females as the result of menstruation combined with restricted food intake.

In young children, iron deficiency is characterized by altered behavior, including excessive wariness, irritability and depression, and altered motor development, including a fear of leaving a parent's side. Adolescents and children who were anemic as infants may end up having lower grades and cognitive test scores; worse math scores; and reduced verbal learning and memory abilities.

It is crucial that babies and young children have enough iron while still developing and growing. Strike while the iron is still hot: Feed your kids red meat, poultry and fish - the best natural sources of dietary iron. Fortified breakfast-type cereals and infant formulas are also excellent sources. Infants 7-12 months old, children ages 4-8, and adolescents ages 14-18 require the most dietary iron. When detected, existing iron-deficiency anemia can be treated immediately with iron supplementation provided by a doctor.

Reference:

Zlotkin S. Clinical nutrition:8. The role of nutrition in the prevention of iron deficiency anemia in infants, children and adolescents. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2003;168(1), pp. 59-63.

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