

[IMAGE]

More Iron Required

By Editorial Staff

Why would I have an iron deficiency? On first blush, you might think micronutrient deficiencies only strike Third-World populations, but you'd be severely mistaken. In fact, depending on the vitamin / mineral in question, anywhere from 50-90% of Americans aren't getting enough. That's a big problem when you consider the proven health benefits of micronutrients.

Why aren't we getting enough micronutrients? It starts with the Standard American Diet (aptly acronymmed SAD), which is increasingly high in processed, empty-calorie foods (think chips, sweets, fast food, etc.) and correspondingly low in, or downright absent of, vitamins and minerals.

Iron is a big one when it comes to deficiencies, and teen girls and young women are particularly at risk of not getting enough of this crucial mineral. According to new research, an estimated four in 10 have low levels. Researchers used two decades of data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, an ongoing national survey designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States, in arriving at their conclusion, published in *JAMA*.

More Iron Required - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Why is iron so important? The National Institutes of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements explains why in its fact sheet on iron: "The body uses iron to make hemoglobin, a protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of the body, and myoglobin, a protein that provides oxygen to muscles. Your body also needs iron to make some hormones." For teen girls / women, iron deficiency is common because of blood loss during menstruation, among other factors.

It's important to note that you can get too much iron, so supplementing iron without having a discussion with your doctor isn't recommended. Step #1 is finding out if you're deficient; step #2 (if you are) is to eat more iron-rich foods and/or add an iron supplement to your nutritional regimen based on your doctor's recommendations.

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