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HOLISTIC HEALING

I've recently gone vegan, can you help me with plant-based iron sources?



Naturopath Gemma Hurditch answers for CNM
(College of Naturopathic Medicine)

Having low iron can affect energy levels, making us fatigued, reducing our immunity, fertility and concentration. Symptoms of low iron include tiredness, recurrent infections and pica (a craving to eat strange things such as soil and ice). If you are having symptoms of low iron, or if you are thinking about supplementing, it is a good idea to have a blood test that checks your ferritin (stored iron) levels. This is considered the most sensitive test to detect iron deficiency. Levels on the low end of normal are worth boosting as the acceptable ferritin levels fall within a wide range.

Practices which can boost iron levels include avoiding tea, coffee and phytate fibre (bran) with meals. All of these items will reduce the iron absorbed from your food, so keep them to at least an hour either side of meals. Increase the vitamin C content of meals to enhance plant-based iron absorption - tomato, citrus, broccoli, sweet peppers, kale and strawberries are all great choices. Avoid over-boiling vegetables which decreases their iron availability by up to 20%. Steam or sauté vegetables until firm but not mushy. Top up on these iron-rich plant foods: organic soy beans, sesame seeds, lentils, Swiss chard, parsley, turmeric, spinach, pak choi, beetroot greens, spring greens and cumin, and remember that vitamin C chaser. Breakfast ideas include a smoothie made with nut milk, spinach leaves, sesame and pumpkin seeds, strawberry and a frozen banana. Try a broccoli, kale and sweet pepper salad with fresh or lightly steamed edamame beans for lunch and a lentil and tomato stew for dinner.



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