

What's the Deal with Iron for Runners?

Runners have unique iron needs that go beyond those of an average person. When there is not enough iron in the diet, the human body doesn't produce an adequate amount of hemoglobin, the protein produced in red blood cells that carry oxygen to the lungs and muscles.

Studies show that low iron ferritin levels can negatively impact performance because there is not enough oxygen getting to the muscles that sustain runs.

How Do Runners Lose Iron?

Runners lose more iron than non-runners for multiple reasons:

Through your feet – A process called foot strike hemolysis occurs in runners, especially those who run high mileage. Foot strike hemolysis is a process where red blood cells are damaged when the foot hits the ground, thus reducing your hemoglobin levels.

Through sweat – Iron is lost through sweating. While the amount of iron loss isn't staggering, for a runner working out in hot and humid conditions, the losses can easily add up.

Through the intestines – Iron loss through the GI tract is fairly minor, but there may be a cumulative effect over months of running that leads to iron deficiency.

Female runners – Female runners have an especially difficult time maintaining proper iron levels since they also lose iron during menstruation. Many female runners choose to take iron supplements for this reason.

Symptoms of Iron Deficiency in Runners:

Here are some of the most common iron deficiency symptoms that runners experience:

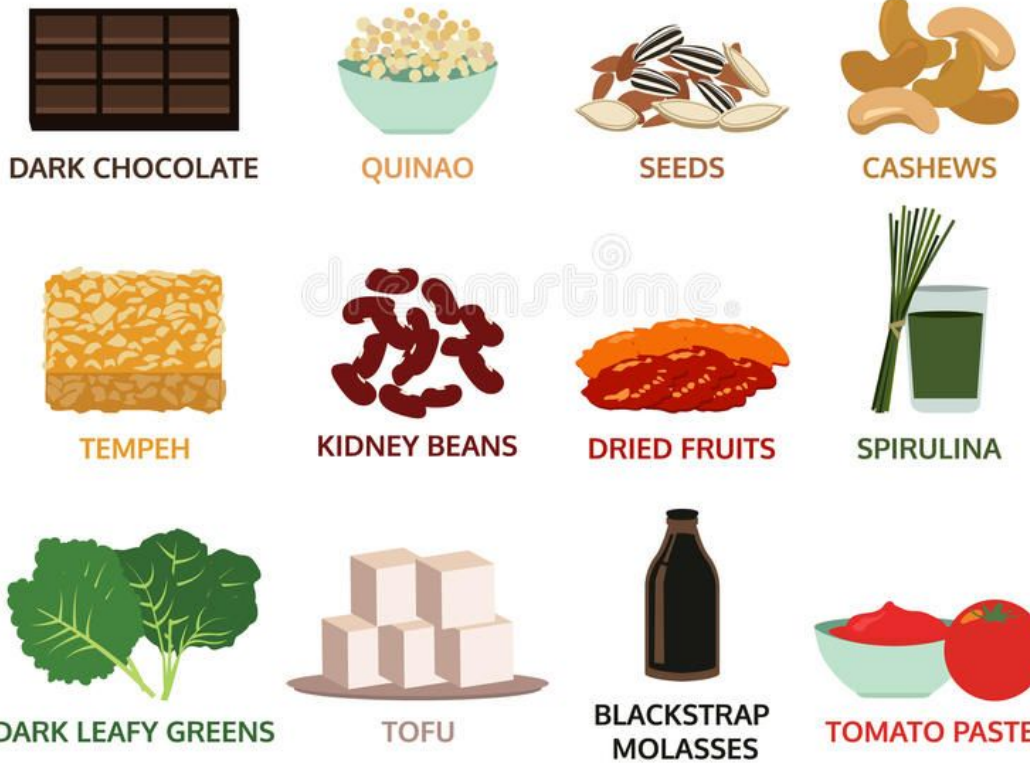
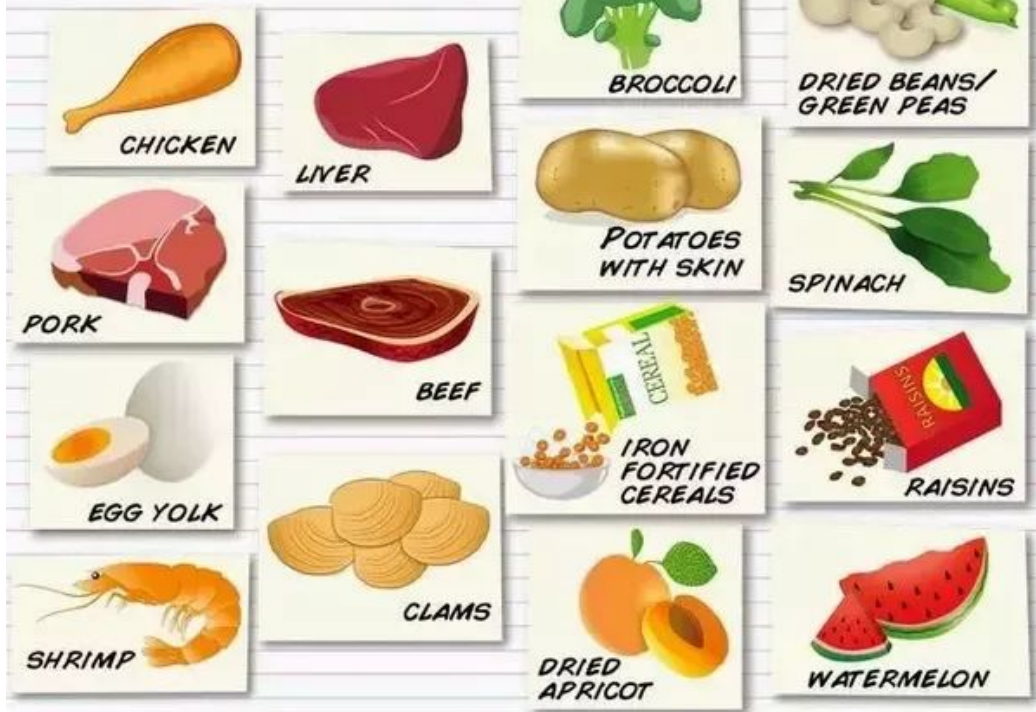
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches
- Dizziness

If you notice a change in your energy while running or exercising, consider seeing your doctor for a blood test to determine if an iron deficiency is to blame. It's important to tell your doctor about your activity level so that he or she can help you get the iron you need to reach your fitness and performance goals.

Iron-rich Foods:

Healthy iron-rich foods include red meat, fish, eggs, legumes, tofu, leafy greens, and iron-fortified grains. (See next page for examples.)

IRON RICH FOOD:



How to Supplement Iron in the Diet

If runners aren't getting the iron their body needs from foods, supplements can help pick up where they leave off.

Most runners probably replace enough iron in the daily diet to keep iron stores within the normal range for training and competition. Girls and women who have normal menstrual cycles have a regular loss of iron which may require supplementation.

Tips for Taking Iron Supplements

- Take supplements at the end of the day (before bed)
- Always take supplements with Vitamin C (orange juice)
- Do not take supplements with coffee or calcium (milk, dairy products, fortified OJ)
- Re-test your iron levels every 2-3 months to monitor improvement
- If supplementation does not raise levels, speak to your doctor. A nutritionist or other professional may be able to help.

SOURCES:

<https://www.runnersworld.com/health-injuries/a20808563/should-all-runners-take-iron-supplements/>

<http://www.fergon.com/runners-require-iron/>

<https://runnersconnect.net/iron-deficiency-in-runners/>