

Iron

Many vegetarians are frequently told that they should eat meat, or at least iron medications, to be able to cover their need in iron. By such arguments, some even let themselves be driven off the more healthy vegetarian nutrition. What does science have to say concerning this widespread opinion?

In the scientific study done on vegetarians by the Ministry of Health in Berlin, the following was ascertained:

*„Our analyses yielded lower values for iron and haemoglobin in female vegetarians; this did not permit, however, to draw any clinically usable conclusions. Furthermore, a new assessment of the so-called lack of iron is more and more being emphasized. There even are some scientists who think that low serum iron values are more helpful to health“.*¹

The recommendation of iron medicaments is explicitly becoming doubtful.

This Berlin study is not the only one having been done in this domain. All serious studies get to similar results (those done or payed by the meat oder milk industry come to other results than the independent studies, of course).

Among the results of a study by the Institute for Alimentation of the Justus-Liebig University of Giessen one can read: *„The average iron values of vegetarians lie in the lower sector of the normal values. As the standard values are based on meat-eating persons, a discussion has now started as to whether they are really binding for all people. This discussion is animated by the fact that iron values in the lower sector of the normal values offer a certain pretection against infections and cardiac infarction.“*² Some studies go even further and perceive a link between certain civilization diseases and too much iron. This is especially valid for the Alzheimer disease,

where an abnormally high concentration of iron is noticeable in the brain.³

Apart from the question of how subnormal iron values are to be interpreted, in a one-sided diet (whether with or without meat) one

is always going to suffer from a lack of vitamins or mineral elements. The best prevention of this can only be attained by a well-balanced

(vegetarian) full-value nutrition with a high portion of fresh (biological) uncooked food. It is also very important that mothers suckle their babies as long as possible and do under no circumstance replace mother's milk with cow milk, as the latter reduces the iron absorption (and thus iron assimilation) of the child; even by enriching the cow milk with iron, this effect can not be levelled out.⁴

Any person maintaining an average diet takes about 25 to 30% of it's iron through animal food (meat, fish, eggs, milk, etc.).⁵ This means that even meat-eaters absorb by far the majority of their iron through vegetal food. The idea that meat is the only food to contain iron must be regarded as one of the myths launched by the meat industry. On the other hand it is a fact that meat contains iron in such a high concentration that the human body, lacking efficient means of excretion (which exist for other spurious elements, e.g. through the urine), is strongly stressed by it.⁶ The only food to contain practically no iron are milk (and the products derivated thereof), sugar, fats and industrially produced food!⁷ Besides all these theoretical considerations it should also be taken into account that vegetarians, having nourished themselves during all their lives in a well-balanced vegetarian way, practically never have any symptoms of lack of iron. Their bodies even seem to be capable of absorbing the iron in the food in a better way than the bodies of meat-eaters do.⁸

„Iron is quite durable, yet one day it will corrode. Some widespread opinions about the advantages of iron in nutrition are going to share the same fate. They, too, will soon blong to the scrap iron“.

Felix Kieffer, expert in spurious elements.

If anybody should ever suffer from acute lack of iron (anemia), e.g. through high blood loss in an accident, even this is no reason to consume meat or meat products. Instead, the following products should be avoided, since they impede the body in absorbing the iron: red wine, black tea, many herbs, coffee, cocoa (as a beverage as well as in chocolate), garlic, onions, dark berries (e.g. black elder, black currant, blueberry, blackberry), fruit containing pectine (apples, pears, bananas), as well as yoghurt and curdled milk. Concerning the berries, it should be mentioned that vitamin C improves the absorption of iron. The (not at all complete) above list shows why

*Content in iron of some eatables
(mg / 100 grams — mg / 7.5 ounces)*

river trout	0.7	barm, brewer's yeast (dried)	17.5
roasted chicken	1.8	chick-peas	6.5
chicken's eggs	1.4	lentils	6.9
veal cutlet	3.0	soy beans	8.6
pork cutlet	2.3	soy flour	10.0
pork liver	22.1	almonds	4.7
boloney sausage	1.7	hazelnuts	3.8
liver-sausage	5.4	pistachio-nuts	7.3
milk, all sorts	0.1	sesame seeds	10.0
indian corn, maize	1.5	sunflower seeds	7.0
oats	5.8	chinese cabbage (uncooked)	0.6
millet	9.0	parsley leaves (uncooked)	8.0
rice	2.6	sorrel (uncooked)	8.5
rye germs	9.0	chanterelles	6.5
wheat germs	7.5	ginger (fresh)	17.0
wheat	3.3	stinging nettles	41.0

meat-eaters are seldom able or willing to avoid beverages containing coffee (coffee, black tea, cocoa), as the consumption of these is connected to their excessive iron values.



Schweizerische Vereinigung für Vegetarismus (SVV), CH-9315 Neukirch-Egnach
For more information about vegetarianism please contact our office:
SVV, Bahnhofstrasse 52, CH-9315 Neukirch-Egnach,
Tel.: +041 (0)71 477 33 77, Fax: (0)71 477 33 78
www.vegetarismus.ch – www.euroveg.eu



¹ This study was done by Prof. Dr. H. Rottka, Berlin.

² C. Leitzmann and P. Michel: „Alternative Kostformen aus ernährungsphysiologischer Sicht“ in: „Akt. Ernährungsmedizin“ Nr. 18 (1993), page 6.

³ Kieffer, Felix: „How iron and other spurious elements influence health“ (Wie Eisen und andere Spurenelemente die menschliche Gesundheit beeinflussen: Eine Neubeurteilung alter Erfahrungen), 1993; the contents of this were given in a conference at the 104th yearly congregation of the Swiss Society for Alimentary and Environmental Chemistry, September 11, 1992, in Les Diablerets.

⁴ John Robbins „Diet for a New America“, Stillpoint Publishing, ISBN 0-913299-54-5, page 164.

⁵ H. Rottka and W. Thefeld „Health and Vegetarian Nutrition“ (Gesundheit und vegetarische Ernährungsweise), by the Institut für Sozialmedizin und Epidemiologie des Bundesgesundheitsamtes Berlin, Akt. Ernährungsmedizin 9 (1984), page 201.

⁶ Kieffer, Felix, op. cit.

⁷ John Robbins, op. cit., page 299

⁸ As reported by many of the scientific studies.