

# Iron supplements in pregnancy and after birth



It is common to have low levels of iron or iron deficiency anemia during pregnancy, even if you are taking a prenatal vitamin. If this happens, you might feel more tired, weak, or dizzy.

Taking an iron supplement is an effective way to improve your iron level. There are many types of iron supplements with different amounts (doses) of iron. It can take time to find the iron supplement that works best for you.

## How much iron do I need?

Your healthcare provider will tell you how much iron to take. It will depend on your iron levels and symptoms. Some people need to try different types of iron supplements to find what works best for them.

### Did you know?

**‘Elemental iron’** is the total amount of iron your body can absorb from an iron supplement.

Different types of iron supplements have different amounts of elemental iron in them. Be sure to read the label or ask your pharmacist to help you find the right supplement.



Your health care provider will tell you how often to take the iron. Some people need it every day, and some need it 3 times a week.



Take the iron for the rest of your pregnancy and for 6 weeks after the birth.

In addition to an iron supplement, continue to eat [foods high in iron](#). Go to our [Patient Education Catalogue](#) and search ‘iron’.



Foods high in iron

## What type of iron supplement should I take?

Your health care provider will usually suggest you take one of the following:

- ferrous fumarate 300 mg (100 mg elemental iron)
- ferrous gluconate 300 mg (35 mg elemental iron)
- ferrous sulfate 300 mg (60 mg elemental iron)

The following are usually not recommended because they cost more, and some have a lower amount of iron.

- polysaccharide iron complex
- ferrous bisglycinate
- heme iron polypeptide

If your iron supplement is not listed here, talk to your healthcare provider to make sure it is the best product for you.

## Are there side effects?

You might get side effects when you first start taking iron. Some side effects improve on their own over time.

Side effects might include the following:

- nausea
- vomiting
- stomach pain
- constipation
- diarrhea
- liquid iron may stain teeth

If you have strong side effects and are having trouble taking the iron, or are not noticing any benefit, talk to your care provider or pharmacist. You might need to change to a different iron supplement with a higher or lower amount of iron.

### What about my prenatal vitamin?

Continue taking your prenatal vitamin once daily during your pregnancy and for at least 6 weeks after birth.

After that, continue to take a prenatal vitamin or a multivitamin with 400 mcg folic acid.



## When do I take my iron?



For the first week, it is good to take your iron with food. This reduces the chance of side effects.



After a week, try to take your iron on an empty stomach, 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal. Your body absorbs iron better when you take it on an empty stomach.



If possible, take your iron supplement at least 2 hours apart from the following. These things make it hard for your body to absorb iron.



- milk, cheese, or yogurt
- calcium supplements
- antacids
- multivitamins, including prenatal vitamins
- coffee or tea

## What if I am taking other medicines?

If you are taking other medicines, ask your health care provider if there are any special instructions.

If you take thyroid medicine (levothyroxine or Synthroid®), take your iron at least 4 hours after taking your thyroid medicine.

## What if I have constipation?

Constipation is when you have a hard time pooping. You might not poop as often as you usually do, or your poops might be dry, hard, or difficult to pass. Many people are able to manage their constipation by doing the following:

- Eating [foods high in fibre](#) can help with constipation. Remember to drink extra water or other liquids when you eat more fibre. Go to our [Patient Education Catalogue](#) and search 'fibre'.
- Taking a medicine called PEG 3350 (brand names are LaxAday® or RestoraLAX®) is helpful for constipation during pregnancy.



High fibre foods

For more information, go to our [Patient Education Catalogue](#) and search 'constipation'.



Constipation

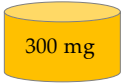
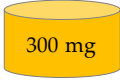
## How do I take ferrous fumarate or ferrous gluconate?

Your health care provider might recommend you take ferrous fumarate or ferrous gluconate. Both of these iron supplements are common in pregnancy. The next 2 pages tell you how to start taking them and slowly increase how much you take.

# Taking ferrous fumarate

I need to take one 300 mg tablet of ferrous **fumarate** once a day, by mouth, on the following days:

- ☐ **Every day**
- ☐ **Only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays**

	With food	On an empty stomach
<b>Week 1:</b> Take with food to help reduce the chance of stomach side effects.		
<b>Week 2:</b> If you have little to no side effects, then if possible stop taking it with food and take it on an empty stomach, 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal.		
<b>Week 3 and after:</b>  If you have little or no side effects, then continue taking it on an empty stomach, 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal.  If you have side effects, then go back to taking it with food or try a ferrous gluconate supplement.		

## Taking ferrous gluconate

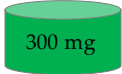
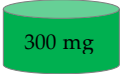
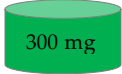
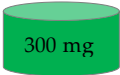
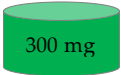
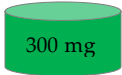



Some people get nausea, constipation, or diarrhea from certain iron supplements. Ferrous **gluconate** has less elemental iron in each tablet, so you can increase the dose more slowly.

Increasing the dose each week can cause fewer side effects.

I need to take one 300 mg tablet of ferrous **gluconate** by mouth on the following days:

- ☐ **Every day**
- ☐ **Only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays**

After the first week, I need to slowly increase the dose each week using the instructions below.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
<b>Week 1:</b> Take 1 tablet with food to help reduce the chance of side effects.			
<b>Week 2:</b> If you have little to no side effects, take 1 tablet, 2 times a day with food.			
<b>Week 3:</b> If you have little to no side effects, take 1 tablet, 3 times a day with food.			
<b>Week 4:</b> If you have little to no side effects, then take 1 tablet, 3 times a day <b>on an empty stomach 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal.</b> *			

If you have side effects after taking it more often or taking it on an empty stomach, go back to taking the last dose that did not give you side effects. If side effects get worse or don't go away, talk to your health care provider.

## My notes

[illegible]