

Diet and Haemochromatosis

There is no specific diet for haemochromatosis. Haemochromatosis cannot be treated by diet.

You should have a healthy, nutritious diet. This will include foods with the small amount of iron that you continue to need.

Any excess iron absorbed by the body must be removed by venesection (similar to donating blood) eventually.

A 500ml venesection removes 0.25g of iron, which is roughly equivalent to 2 to 5 months' worth of iron absorbed from your diet.

So eat what you like, as long as you participate in life-long monitoring of iron levels and you have enough venesections every year of your life to keep your iron stores at safe levels.

If you are having lots of venesections extra vitamin B12 and folate, either in your diet or taken as a supplement can be very helpful.

Iron supplements are best avoided

Iron fortified foods and drinks are best avoided. These include some breakfast cereals, some kinds of milk, orange juices and 'energy food drinks'. Many multivitamin supplements contain iron as well as many sports energy bars and drinks.

Vitamin C

Large doses of vitamin C taken over a prolonged period may increase iron absorption.

Vitamin C supplements (tablets) should be avoided except when you have a vitamin C deficiency or directed by your doctor.

This does not mean you should avoid fruit juice or fruit and vegetables containing vitamin C. The amounts contained in these foods will not significantly impact on your iron levels.

A healthy, nutritious diet

For good health, choose fresh unprocessed foods that are high in nutrients and low in saturated fats.



Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods:

- Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits and legumes (beans, baked beans, chickpeas, lentils)
- Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles) preferably wholegrain
- Include lean meat, fish, poultry or vegetarian alternatives
- Include low-fat dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheeses
- Drink plenty of water

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and take care to:

- Eat only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars
- Choose lower fat foods and limit saturated fat in your diet (butter, cream, meat fats)
- Choose foods low in salt
- Drink within the safe limits if you choose to drink (maximum 2 standard drinks per day with two alcohol-free days each week).

You might like to consult a dietician or refer to the Dietitians Association of Australia website <http://daa.asn.au/> .

What about alcohol?

Any alcohol consumed can increase liver problems and increase iron absorption. Limit your alcohol intake to safe drinking levels as recommended by the Nation Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

If you have any liver injury then you should not consume any alcohol.

Australian Alcohol Guidelines:

- For healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces your risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury over a lifetime.

- Drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.

What about seafood?

People with high iron levels should be careful eating raw seafood.

Vibrio vulnificus is a bacterium that can cause rapid and life threatening septicaemia:

- It is rare but not unknown in Australian waters
- It thrives in the blood of people with high Serum Ferritin
- It is found in raw seafood, particularly in raw oysters and raw clams
- It can be found in seafood from India, Asia and Mexico.

Cooking the seafood destroys the bacterium. People with high Serum Ferritin should watch cuts and abrasions which occur in sea water and seek help if they do not heal well.



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Inherited iron overload disorder