

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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Some recent medical articles have highlighted again how our bodies, and our nutritional needs, change as we go through life. For babies and young children, iron is an essential nutrient. Without it they can't keep making enough blood to keep their growing bodies growing well. But for elders, there can be too much of a good thing.

Most of us know that iron is a crucial part of our blood. Without iron blood can't carry oxygen from our lungs to the rest of our bodies. The symptoms of anemia, or lack of red blood cells, are that we feel tired and sleepy all the time. Our bodies are actually suffocating from lack of oxygen. But more than just making blood, iron is necessary for our immune system. Our brain and muscles won't work without iron.

Infants get a small supply of iron from their mothers at birth. Before long however they've used all that to make blood. Then they need more, on a regular basis. While human mother's milk does contain iron, cow's milk does not. That's why most infant formula has iron added. Without that steady supply of iron, babies are at risk of developing anemia. An anemic toddler will still run around, but their brain won't work as well. They won't remember or learn as fast as they could.

Adults aren't growing so fast, so we don't need as much iron. Men, who don't lose blood every month, don't need as much as women do to maintain their blood iron levels. Women after menopause don't need nearly as much iron as they did before.

But how many of us take a multivitamin that contains iron? Go check the label! How many people will take an iron supplement when they think they're too tired? The

answer is that there are lots of people taking iron supplements who probably don't need them. And there's a growing lot of evidence that more is not better when it comes to iron. Too much might actually be harmful!

There is one disease, hemochromatosis or iron overload, where we know that too much iron is definitely toxic. People with this genetic condition must avoid extra iron. It accumulates in their bodies and causes aches and joint pains, darker skin, liver and sexual problems, and eventually leads to arthritis, liver disease and diabetes. These people are often told to donate blood regularly to get rid of some excess iron.

The rest of us without those genes are not out of the woods though. Medical people are starting to say that there are connections between too much iron and problems with the nervous system. These include Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Problems with the circulation, including hardening of the arteries, strokes and diabetes, are being connected to too much iron. And at least a few reports are saying that too much iron might be tied to hypertension and maybe even some cancers. One report suggests that excess iron in the system is one cause of aging.

Iron is naturally present in many foods, especially in red meats. Most breads, cereals and baked goods are made with fortified flour, and many products have extra fortification. Some breakfast cereals have 100% of the Daily Value in one serving. Usually our bodies are pretty good at controlling how much iron we absorb from foods, only keeping it when we need more. But with highly fortified foods plus iron in supplements we can still accumulate more than we need. A normal healthy, varied diet usually gives us all the iron we need. Adult men and post-menopausal women don't need iron in a supplement unless their doctor tells them they do.

One suggestion to help counteract the possible effects of excess iron is to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. These foods are good sources of a variety of antioxidants. Antioxidants might be able to prevent or repair the damage that too much iron causes.

Here's a good, hot soup to warm our bodies these cool evenings. Using barley instead of rice will help keep cholesterol levels down too. Feel free to trade the vegetables in it for any others that your family prefers. Just be sure to use plenty of them, canned, frozen or fresh!

#### BEEF AND BARLEY SOUP

1 lb lean hamburger	6-7 cups water
1 pkg beef bouillon	14 oz can of tomatoes
1 cup celery (chopped fine)	1 cup carrots
1 cup onion	1/2 cup quick cooking barley
1/4 cup parsley	salt and pepper, to taste
garlic to taste (optional)	2 Tbsp oil

Brown beef in 2 Tbsp oil. Add 6 cups water to pot, bring to boil, simmer 10 min.

Dissolve bouillon in 1/2 cup of water. Add vegetables and bouillon to pot. Add barley, simmer 1/2 hour till barley is tender. Adjust water to thickness desired. Add parsley, adjust salt and pepper, serve. Serves 4-6