



Take care if using iron skillet for baby food

I understand that babies are at risk for iron deficiency. Should I cook baby food (apple sauce, for example) in a cast-iron skillet to increase the iron content?

Cooking foods in cast-iron skillets can greatly increase iron content in your food, but you need be vigilant that you don't overdo it. Your baby's health depends on it.

The amount of iron babies need varies greatly with their age. Most full-term babies are born with nearly all the iron they need until they double their weight -- usually at about 4 to 6 months of age. But after that, their daily requirement increases substantially — the recommendation is 11 milligrams a day for infants 7 to 12 months old, and then goes down to 7 milligrams a day for children 1 to 3 years old.

To prevent iron deficiency, mothers who breastfeed can supplement their baby's diet with plain, iron-fortified cereal beginning at about 6 months of age, as well as baby foods rich in vitamin C to improve iron absorption. Mothers who can't breastfeed should use iron-fortified formula beginning at about 6 months. At about one year of age, you can start feeding your child iron-rich foods, such as lean beef or iron-fortified breads or cereals.

If you want to increase iron content by using cast-iron cookware, be aware that the more acidic a food is, the

more iron it will absorb. For example, the iron content in apple sauce, an acidic food, increases from 0.26 milligrams in 100 grams (about 3.5 ounces) to 6.26 milligrams. Other foods could be less or more, depending on the food. There aren't any handy charts to consult to know exactly.

You do want to make sure your child gets enough iron — iron deficiency in very young children can cause problems in both normal physical activity and normal thinking and mental processing skills. But it's also possible to get too much iron. The upper limit for iron for infants and children is 40 milligrams a day. So, if you do start using the iron skillet for heating baby food, be mindful of the amount of iron your baby consumes.

Also, be on the watch for signs of iron toxicity, especially if you are using iron fortified products, including baby formula. The first stage includes nausea, diarrhea, and, in extreme cases, hemorrhaging. The second stage can be deceptive — abdominal problems improve, but internal abnormalities continue. For complete information on iron toxicity, see the Emergency Medicine page on WebMD at <http://www.emedicine.com/EMERG/topic285.htm>. If you suspect any form of iron toxicity, get medical attention for your baby immediately.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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