Infants, toddlers at risk for low iron

Why are young children at higher risk of iron deficiency than adults?

Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency in the United States and is the leading cause of anemia.

But you're absolutely right. Young children — ages 6 months to 3 years — are at even higher risk than adults. At that age, they are experiencing rapid growth that requires higher levels of iron, and they often simply don't get enough from their diet.

A recent study from West Virginia University indicates the problem may be bigger than experts realize. Iron deficiency often is not diagnosed until it gets bad enough for anemia to develop. This study looked for iron deficiency in young children who had not been diagnosed with anemia. The study was small, with just 57 infants and toddlers included in the results, and it was conducted in an area with higher-than-average rates of anemia. But researchers found that more than 20 percent of the children in the study were, in fact, iron deficient, and they found that 8 percent had anemia that was previously undiagnosed.

Anemia is dangerous because it means your body doesn't have enough hemoglobin, which carries oxygen from the lungs to other areas of the body and helps with the functioning of several organs.

Being iron deficient puts anyone at higher risk of developing anemia, and, in infants, it can delay the development of normal activity and movement, as well as normal thinking and mental processing skills.

To prevent iron deficiency from forming in young children, take these precautions offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

• If possible, breastfeed until the baby is at least a year old. At age 6 months, also feed the baby plain, iron-fortified cereal two or more times a day.

• Don't feed your baby milk (cow, goat or soy milk) until he or she is at least a year old. Milk is low in iron, and your baby could easily fill up on it rather than foods higher in iron.

• If you can't breastfeed, be sure to feed your baby an infant formula fortified with iron.

• After age 6 months, pair foods rich in vitamin C with any foods rich in "non-heme" iron, to help with iron absorption. Foods high in non-heme iron include various fortified cereals, beans and other lentils, spinach and tomato paste. Foods rich in heme iron, which doesn't need vitamin C to help with absorption, include beef, shrimp and organ meats.

Pregnant women are also at higher risk for iron deficiency, which can increase the risk of premature birth.

For more information on iron deficiency for all ages, see the CDC Web site at http://www.cdc.gov, and search for "Nutrition for Everyone: Iron Deficiency."

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.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

For the week of Jan. 20, 2007

By Martha Filipic
(614) 292-9833
filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Editor:
This column was reviewed by Hugo Melgar-Quinonez, nutrition specialist with Ohio State University Extension, researcher with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, and assistant professor in the Department of Human Nutrition, College of Education and Human Ecology.

To receive Chow Line by e-mail, send a message to filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu or sign up at http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php.

Section of Communications and Technology
News and Media Relations
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780