Background:
Iron deficiency anemia is the world’s most common nutritional deficiency. Iron is a mineral found in red blood cells that carries oxygen throughout the body. If the body does not have enough iron stored in the blood, iron-deficiency anemia can occur. Anemia is characterized by weakness, lethargy, muscle fatigue, and shortness of breath.

As iron is stored in the blood, the most common cause of low iron levels is blood loss. In adults, this blood loss can be attributed to heavy menstruation or intestinal bleeding from peptic ulcers or hemorrhoids. Additional causes of low iron include increased intestinal motility, celiac or Crohn’s disease, kidney failure especially when treated with dialysis, and athletes. Another possible explanation for iron deficiency, especially in children and young people, is a diet low in iron.

In a similar way that too little iron is harmful to the body, storing too much iron, called hemochromatosis, can also cause damage. Patients with hemochromatosis are unable to regulate their bodies iron levels, causing dangerous amounts to be stored and absorbed by the body. Eventually the iron levels will cause damage to the patient’s internal organs, including the liver, heart, and pancreas.

Dietary Iron Tips:
There are two types of iron:
- **Heme iron**: found in meats, poultry, and fish. Heme iron is more easily absorbed by the body than non-heme iron; although heme iron can also promote the absorption of non-heme iron.
- **Non-heme iron**: found in both plant and animal food products.

The recommended daily iron intake for adults is approximately 10 milligrams for men and 15 milligrams for women. There are a few nutrients that can inhibit or assist the body’s ability to absorb iron:
- **Vitamin C** promotes iron absorption. For patients with low iron levels, it is beneficial to incorporate foods like citrus fruits or juices into their diet.
- **Phytic and tannic aids** are two acids found in food that, in large amounts, can inhibit iron uptake by the body. Phytic acid is found in breads and foods made from whole grains. Tannic acid is found in coffee, cola drinks, chocolate, and red wines.
- **Low stomach acid** (hypochlorhydria) or administration of antacids decreases the absorption of non-heme iron.
- **Iron supplements** should only be used by adults when there is a true iron deficiency and only under supervision of a physician. Use by children can cause serious damage and may lead to poisoning.

What foods or food products CONTAIN iron?
- Bran flakes cereal
- Total cereal
- Life cereal
- Raisin bran cereal
- Kix cereal
- Oatmeal
- Rice Krispies cereal
- Cheerios cereal
- Whole-wheat bread
- Apricots
- Raisins
- Figs
- Prune juice
- Potato, baked with skin
- Eggs
- Beef liver
- Ground beef
- Sirloin steak
- Halibut
- Salmon
- Tuna
- Clams
- Shrimp
- Navy beans
- Kidney beans
- Spinach
- Green peas
- Broccoli
- Legumes
- Lima beans
- Soybeans
- Almonds
- Brazil nuts
- Kale
- Oats
- Brown rice

Altering the body’s iron intake can have serious health consequences. Therefore, attempting a high/low iron diet without physician supervision is not recommended. Your healthcare provider is the best source of information for questions and concerns related to your health. A registered dietitian can also be a great resource for helping you consume adequate iron from foods. To schedule an appointment with our Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, call 602-422-9800 or visit www.arizonadigestivehealth.com/help-desk-forms/request-an-appointment.