

Nutrition Guidelines for Individuals with Hemochromatosis

People with **hemochromatosis** absorb more iron from their diets than they need. This extra iron can build up in the body and make the person feel unwell. Common symptoms are joint pain and feeling tired and weak. Liver damage can also occur.

The main treatment for hemochromatosis is **therapeutic phlebotomy**, when blood is removed regularly to help lower the amount of iron in the body.

There are a few ways you can change your diet to help you stay as healthy as possible with hemochromatosis. It is important to remember that **therapeutic phlebotomy is by far the most important treatment for hemochromatosis**, so drastic changes to your regular diet are not needed.

1. Enjoy a well balanced diet that includes a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy products and meats and meat alternates.
2. Foods high in the most absorbable kind of iron should be taken in moderation. These foods are meat, fish and poultry.

Vary your protein foods. Instead of having meat, fish or poultry everyday choose vegetarian foods like dried peas, beans and lentils or tofu instead. When you do eat meat, fish or poultry, keep portions small (2 to 3 ounces). Fish and poultry are usually lower in iron than red meats.

Organ meats, cooked clams, oysters and mussels are extra high in iron. Choose these foods less often.

3. If you enjoy tea, consider drinking it daily. One study showed that tea taken with meals lowered the amount of iron absorbed from the foods eaten at the meals. Coffee also lowers the amount of iron absorbed from foods, but not quite as much as tea. Tea has the added benefit of being high in antioxidants and it contains less caffeine.
4. Some hot cereals are highly **enriched** with iron (for example, instant oatmeal and cream of wheat). Regular oatmeal and other hot and cold cereals contain smaller amounts of iron. Choose these more often.
5. Cast iron pots and pans can add iron to foods cooked in them. Stainless steel also has this effect. When possible, choose glass or ceramic cookware.

6. **Be careful with raw seafood.** Bacteria in raw seafood, especially shellfish, can cause a life threatening infection in people with hemochromatosis. To kill the bacteria:

- - o Cook all seafood thoroughly.
 - o Use hot soapy water to clean kitchen utensils, cutting boards and plates well after preparing raw fish and shellfish.
 - o Sanitize preparation area and cutting boards with a mixture of one teaspoon of bleach in one litre (4 cups) of water.
 - o Choose restaurants carefully, as cleanliness standards vary.
 - o A void eating raw or undercooked seafood, especially the following:

oysters	squid	clams
octopus	shrimp	sushi
conch	ceviche (marinated raw fish)	mussels
- Notify your doctor if you become sick after eating seafood.*

7. **Be careful with alcohol,** for several reasons. Alcohol causes your body to absorb more iron from foods. Some wines are high in iron. Too much alcohol can damage your liver, so use alcohol only in moderation or as advised by your doctor. If you have liver damage you should not drink alcohol.

Moderation means no more than 2 drinks per day and less than 14 drinks per week for men and 9 drinks per week for women. One standard drink equals 12 ounces of beer (1 bottle), 5 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of spirits (hard liquor) like vodka or whiskey, or 3 ounces of sherry or port.

8. **Do not take any vitamin or mineral supplements unless your doctor approves them.**

- Do not take iron supplements, including multivitamin/mineral supplements with iron.
- Do not take zinc supplements or lozenges (commonly used for colds) because some studies show that people with hemochromatosis absorb more zinc than their bodies need.
- Do not take Vitamin C supplements because large amounts of Vitamin C can make your body absorb more iron. It is all right to eat fruits and vegetables that contain Vitamin C.

9. **If you are thinking about taking herbal supplements or other natural products,** be sure to check with your doctor first. Some herbs can affect your liver, or change how some medications work.

10. **Before and after your therapeutic phlebotomy sessions,** drink plenty of fluids (water, juice or milk) to replace the fluids you lose through phlebotomy. Avoid strenuous physical activity for 24 hours.

Developed by: Lori Fortier, RDN, Liver Transplant Program Susan Firus, RDN, Dial-a-Dietitian

Reviewed by: Dr. Siegfried R. Erb, MD, FRCPC, Founding Medical Director, Liver Transplant Program

Care has been taken to ensure that this information is accurate at the time of publication. This information is, however, intended for general guidance only.

The Canadian Hemochromatosis Society disclaims for itself and for the author of this information, all responsibility for any misstatements or for consequences of actions taken by any person while acting on information contained herein.

Physicians and patients must make their own decisions about therapy according to the individual circumstances of each case.