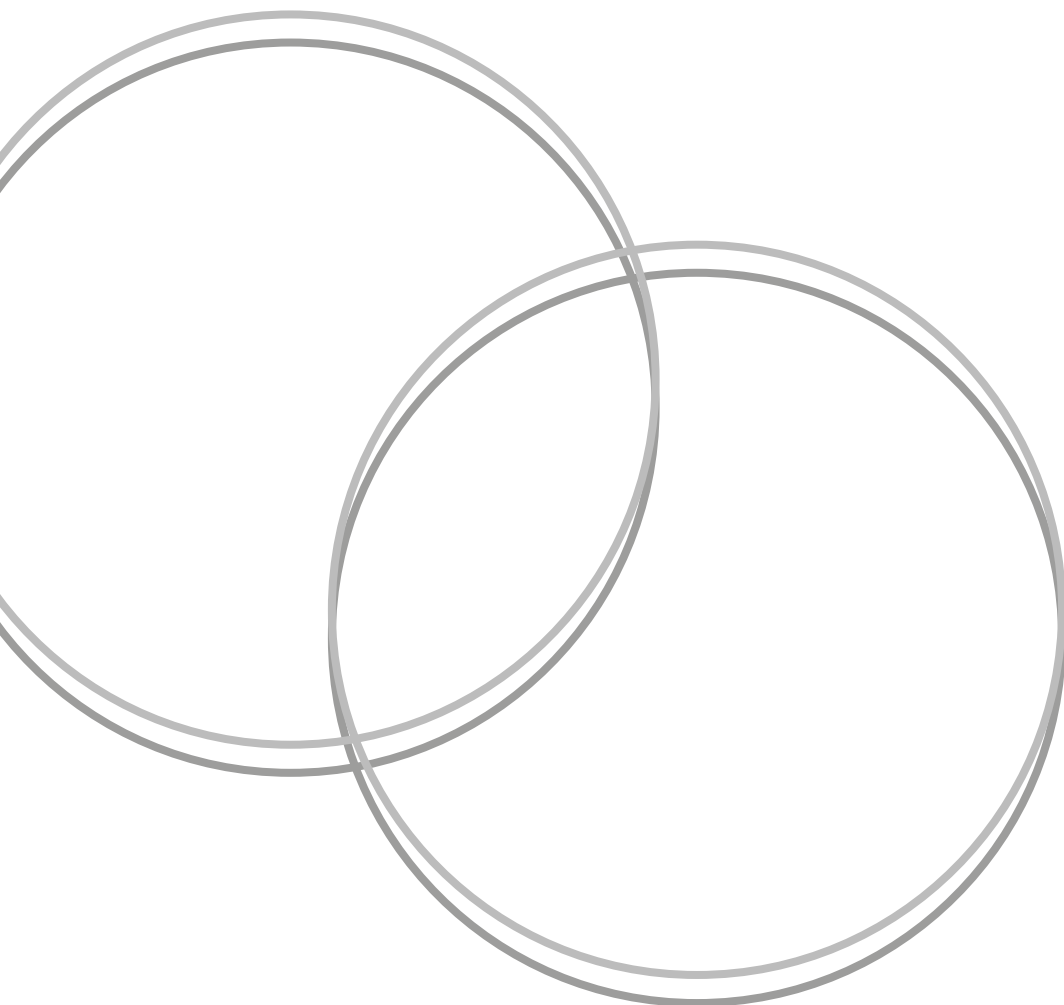


Iron supplements for babies

Information for parents and carers



This leaflet explains the national recommendations on iron supplements for babies born earlier or smaller than average, at the time of going home from hospital.

Iron is a mineral our bodies need to make **red blood cells**, and to develop **brain cells** and the **connections between brain cells**.

Babies need a lot of iron because their brains are developing very quickly. Connections between brain cells form more quickly in the first six months of life than at any other time.

Low levels of iron in the body can lead to a low number of red blood cells (anaemia), which can affect **brain development** and cause problems later in life (for example behavioural problems in childhood). Anaemia can also make us feel weak, tired and breathless.

Babies born early or small may start out with less iron than other babies and need more iron to grow and develop.

The national recommendations

The Neonatal Dietitians Group of the British Dietetic Association (BDA) – the Association of UK Dietitians – recommends that babies born early or small should have an iron supplement.

This means babies:

- born **before 37 weeks** of pregnancy (including those born up to 36 weeks and six days of pregnancy)
- who weigh **less than 2.5kg (5.5lb)** at birth.

In this leaflet we focus on babies born between 34 and 36 weeks of pregnancy, or who weigh between 1.8kg and 2.5kg at birth (4lb to 5.5lb).

Why iron supplements are recommended

We get most of our iron from solid food, and babies should not start eating solid food until around six months of age.

During the first six months of life, iron stores **drop**, and some babies become anaemic.

Research shows that giving iron supplements to babies born early or small means they are less likely to be anaemic, and less likely to experience certain problems later in life.

How to get iron supplements for your baby

You will need a prescription, as you cannot buy iron supplements for your baby over the counter. As the supplements are not given until your baby is 2 weeks old, the prescription will usually be issued by the baby's GP. The prescription can then be collected from your local pharmacy. The hospital doctors will write to the baby's GP to let them know this is needed.

In certain situations, a one off supply of iron supplements may be provided by the hospital before you and your baby are discharged home.

Any further prescriptions will then need to be issued by your GP and collected from your local pharmacy.

How to give iron supplements to your baby

Follow the instructions on the bottle and ask your GP or Pharmacist if you have any questions.

Most iron supplements are given by a syringe into your baby's mouth – the syringe will be in the box or packaging.

How long your baby should take them for

Your baby should take iron supplements for six months, starting when they are between two and six weeks old.

Don't worry if there is some delay in getting the prescription – just try to start the iron supplements before your baby is six weeks old. If your GP has not received a letter from the hospital, you can also show them this leaflet.

If your baby was born **before 34 weeks** of pregnancy or weighed **less than 1.8kg (4lb)** at birth they should continue to take iron supplements until they are **one year old**.

How much to give your baby

There are three common kinds of iron preparation.

- If your GP prescribes **ferrous fumarate** (140mg/5ml), your baby should have 0.6ml once each day.
- If your GP prescribes **sodium feredetate** (Sytron), your baby should have 1ml once each day.
- If your GP prescribes **ferrous sulfate** (125mg/ml), your baby should have 0.2ml once each day.

If you want to give your baby **multivitamins**, please **check whether they contain iron**.

Don't give an iron supplement **as well as** a multivitamin that contains iron.

Infant formula designed for premature babies

If your baby is on an infant formula designed for premature babies, the iron supplement is **included in the formula**.

Therefore, if your baby is having **more than half their feeds** with infant formula designed for premature babies, they do **not** need to take an iron supplement as well.

Infant formula designed for premature babies is only available on prescription from your GP, and states on the packaging that it is for babies who have been born early.

Ask your **GP, Neonatal Outreach Nurse** or **Health Visitor** if you are unsure what type of formula you have.

We would like to thank the Oxfordshire Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership for their contribution to the development of this leaflet.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

We would like to thank the Oxfordshire Maternity Voices Partnership for their contribution in the development of this leaflet.

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