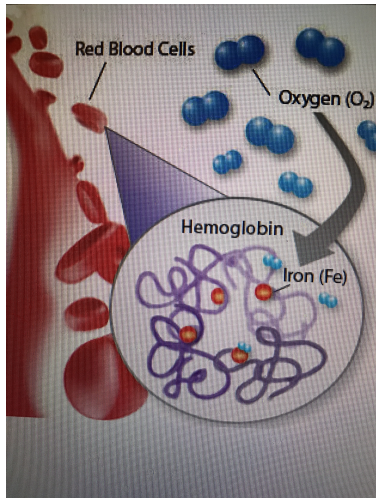


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Hello, Friends!



The Truth about Iron and Running

So, you get an iron panel drawn and your doctor says your lab work is normal. Great! But, not so fast. The “normal” iron/ferritin level most labs report holds true for a stationary person, but NOT an athlete, particularly a runner. As a runner you need to be your own advocate, look at your numbers and know what they mean.

Most research on competitive runners suggest ferritin levels need to be above 30, some reports argue 40 and even 50, for a runner to perform at their best. Levels below this (which vary slightly based on the individual) can cause an athlete to experience a drop in performance.

What is iron and why is it important?

You may remember iron as an element from the periodic table in chemistry class. However iron is way more important than that! It's an element that is found in your hemoglobin (a part of your red blood cells) and plays a role in oxygen exchange. When your body is working (aka running) your muscles use oxygen, otherwise you go into oxygen debt and bad things happen (lactic acid, burning legs, can't breath, etc). Blood flows to your working muscles bringing oxygen so you can keep running, thank you iron.

So why would your iron be low?

Menses: First of all, the obvious. If you are a female who menstruates, you are loosing iron. For women that aren't competing or slightly active, this isn't noticeable. However, if you are competing and training hard you will if your body cannot keep up with the amount you've lost.

Hemolysis/GI/Sweat:

GI- Conditions such as Celiac disease (sprue), ulcerative colitis, Crohn's or IBS can all either prevent iron from being absorbed or increased the amount iron lost

in stool. In the case of celiacs, an undiagnosed individual eats gluten, which damages the villi in the intestine, which helps with the absorption of nutrients, like iron. Since the villi are damaged from the gluten, they cannot absorb iron and therefore your levels drop.

Diet: Vegetarians and vegans are at a higher risk of having low iron since they aren't eating meat, which contains a crap ton of iron, particularly your red meats.

Foods rich in iron:

Food with iron contain heme and/or non-heme iron. Non-heme iron (non-meat) isn't absorbed as well whereas heme iron is absorbed very well.

Heme sources: Beef, chicken, liver, oysters, sardines, turkey (dark meat is richer), salmon, tuna,

Non- Heme sources: enriched breakfast cereal (Special K), beans, tofu, dried apricots, pumpkin seeds, blackstrap molasses, potato.

What are the symptoms:

- Ice cravings
- Restless legs
- Fatigue (literally unable to make it through a day without falling asleep)
- Shortness of breath, particularly climbing stairs and/or hills
- Burning muscles when working them
- Pale conjunctiva
- Anxiety
- Poor concentration

What to do if your iron levels are low?

First recommendation is to start taking an iron supplement. Some people find that iron pills are hard on their stomach. I prefer to take it before bed, so any stomach issues occur when I am sleeping. If your iron is low, trust me you'll sleep through any mild stomach discomfort. The other important thing to note is to NOT take your iron pill with calcium or caffeine containing food/drinks. What you should do is take it with food that is rich in vitamin C. I eat a lot of pasta (like most runners) so I use tomato sauce and extra tomatoes in my sauce to boost the absorption. In addition, I cook the sauce and tomatoes in an iron cast skillet.

If an iron pill with vitamin C doesn't work, I suggest trying a liquid supplement. Liquid iron is more easily absorbed and tends to be easier on the stomach. The only downside is you are essentially taking it as a shot and the flavor isn't the greatest. I suggest a shot of iron with OJ.

What to know about iron supplements: Your stool will be black. You will likely be

constipated. I prefer Hemaplex as an oral iron supplement because I don't think it is constipating. Drink lots of fluids, and remember don't freak out and think you have a GI bleed when you see dark stool.

If iron supplementation doesn't work, go see your doctor. Like I mentioned before, you may have to be tested for Celiacs to rule that out as a reason. If you are an undiagnosed celiacs person iron pills are going to do crap. Also, there are a few random genetic disorders that impact the transport system of iron. You could also have a GI bleed, or H.Plyori (a bacteria in your gut), so they may want to do an upper and/or lower GI scope with a biopsy!

**Happy Running,
Kickasso with Bertasso**



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