Iron Supplements
What they are for and how to find the right kind for you

What is iron?
Iron is a mineral that is found in many foods. Our bodies need iron to carry oxygen to our tissues, build enzymes, and for other functions. We usually get the iron we need from eating a healthy diet, but some people need to take iron supplements because their iron level is too low. Sometimes, extra iron is needed to help certain skin conditions. For example, people who are trying to regrow hair need extra iron.

What should I know about iron supplements?
- Most iron supplements are low-cost and safe.
- Iron works very slowly. You will need to take it for several months before you see its effects.
- The ferrous sulfate (FeS) form of iron is very effective. It is the form doctors prescribe most often.
- Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. We advise you to take 500 mg of vitamin C at the same time you take your iron supplement. This is very important if you take a slow-release iron.

Side Effects

Nausea
Ferrous sulfate can cause nausea and upset stomach. To prevent this, you may want to try coated or slow-release forms. These are not as effective, but they are usually easier to tolerate.

Constipation
Many people who take iron supplements have constipation and black-colored stools. If you are constipated:
- Drink more water.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Take a stool softener every day or every other day.
Other Medicines
Iron blocks the absorption of many antibiotics. If you start taking an antibiotic, talk with your doctor to see if you should stop taking iron supplements for a while.

Product Examples
Iron Supplements
These are just 2 of the iron supplements that you can buy without a prescription (over the counter). Ask your health care provider for recommendations.

Slow FE Iron Supplement: $26.99* for 90 tablets
Walgreen’s Ferrous Sulfate: $8.50* for 100 tablets

Recommended Stool Softeners
For constipation, take 1 tablet of 100 mg docusate sodium (Colace) every day or every other day.

Colace Stool Softener: $24.99* for 60 capsules
Walgreen’s Easy-Lax: $8.99* for 60 softgels

*Prices shown are current as of February 2011.