

Summer 2010

Iron in beef

Iron is one of the most recognised minerals we associate with beef consumption, and in particular it has been historically targeted to women in advertising and health teachings since before I was born.

Women need up to 4 times the iron intake of men and they need it in a palatable format to encourage consumption.

As iron is used in the hemoglobin [blood] its levels need to be maintained.

Men will lose on average all of the iron they take each day while women will lose up to a whopping 2.2 times the intake, dependant on the person.

Natural products containing iron are best for ease of use, these include beef, lamb and pork liver. Beef generally has 10% more usable iron than lamb but both are higher than pork, chicken and fish, with the female lamb being slightly higher than the male lamb. (With the exception of chicken liver.)

Highest levels are found in aged beef that is those we would ordinarily pass up as 'too old' and in the longissimus muscles of a beast, the good news is that the longissimus muscle is know in the restaurant trade as Rib eye or scotch fillet, sirloin, or fillet (the prime cuts).

Noticeably we can only absorb 15% to 35% of the available iron in foods we eat, and once our body has all it needs it stops absorption to avoid the toxic effects of iron over load. The addition of vitamin C in the diet will enhance iron absorption while the inclusion of tannin in tea will be detrimental to the absorption process.

Other figures of merit include, 2% to 20% of available iron from plant sources is able to be absorbed by the body.

The very action of excessive heat reduces the iron content in beef, temperatures over 55 Celsius cause rapid soluble iron loss, with an increase in usable heme iron an element of iron responsible for oxygen in the blood.

The best iron is found in the free flowing juice of red meat, its blood cells, and this is best consumed as rare as palatable.

Losses associated with freezing are staggering with up to 90% of all soluble iron lost in the juices that run from a defrosting piece of meat.