Does eating ice correct an iron deficiency? [1]

Dear Alice,

My sister has been told by one doctor that eating ice is effective for an iron deficiency. Another doctor says that this is balderdash and not effective.

What is the deal? Which opinion is correct? Why is there no consensus on the feedback physicians give for this subject?

I also would like pointers to more information for this topic.

Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's good to see that you're actively helping your sister out. It appears that there may have been some misunderstanding or miscommunication between your sister and the first medical professional she visited. In either case, the health care providers are referring to pica, which is the practice of compulsively eating unusual substances with little or no nutritional value, such as ice. It is believed that this craving for ice could be a symptom of an existing iron deficiency in some individuals practicing pica. Ice is frozen water, and water neither contains iron nor corrects an iron deficiency. Dietary sources of iron and iron supplements do that task.

If your sister has been diagnosed by a health care provider as being iron deficient, she will need to speak with her health care provider and a registered dietitian about what she can do to improve her iron status. If she has been recommended to take iron supplements, it might be worth checking out Iron, calcium, and constipation, oh my! [2] from the Go Ask Alice! Nutrition and Physical Activity [3] archives for more specific information on iron supplements and dietary interactions.

Otherwise, rich dietary sources of iron are an effective and safe way to improve your sister's iron levels. She needs to include more of these iron-rich sources in her diet. Consider reading Sources of iron [4] for more general information on why folks need iron and a list of iron-rich dietary sources.

Regarding sources for more information about eating ice to treat an iron deficiency, you could seek the advice of a registered dietitian. You might ask your health care provider for a referral.
to one in your area. If the dietitian is unable to provide you with the information you need, then maybe s/he can refer you to another person who could be more helpful for you. Good luck in your search!

Alice!
Category: Food for Thought

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Resources

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Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [9]
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Published date: Apr 25, 1997
Last reviewed on: Dec 05, 2003

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