



Protein



Why do you need protein?

- Important for every cell in the body; including skin, hair, muscle and bones
- Helps you recover from surgery or illness and heal from injury
- Improves sugar digestion and steadies blood glucose levels

How much protein do you need?

Adults need 10–35% of their calories to come from protein. The minimum for good health is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (about 40–60 grams). However, research shows that older adults may benefit from amounts as high as 1–1.5 grams per kilogram, or about 25–35 grams of protein per meal.

Protein is found in more than just meat and dairy. It is possible to get all of your protein needs with just plant foods. If most of your protein is coming from plant sources, it is important to eat a wide variety of foods.

Check the list to see how protein compares in animal and plant sources.

Animal Sources	Serving Size	Protein
Chicken breast, skinless	3 oz	26 grams
Lean beef, sirloin, broiled	3 oz	26 grams
Pork, loin, roasted	3 oz	23 grams
Salmon, sockeye	3 oz	23 grams
Tuna, canned, drained	3 oz	20 grams
Cottage cheese	½ cup	14 grams
Greek yogurt, nonfat	5.3 oz	13 grams
Yogurt, nonfat	5.3 oz	6 grams
Milk	1 cup	8 grams
Cheese, cheddar	1 oz	6 grams
Egg	1 large	6 grams
Plant sources		
Tempeh	½ cup	17 grams
Soybeans (edamame)	½ cup	9 grams
Tofu	½ cup	9 grams
Lentils, cooked	½ cup	9 grams
Kidney beans, canned, drained	½ cup	8 grams
Peanut butter	2 Tbsp	9 grams
Soymilk	1 cup	7 grams
Quinoa, cooked	½ cup	4 grams
Almonds	23 nuts, 1 oz	6 grams
Rice, cooked	½ cup	2 grams
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	4 grams



What if you don't get enough protein?

When your body lacks protein, it cannot function to the best of its ability. One of the most concerning things that can develop is **sarcopenia**. This is the natural loss of skeletal muscle and loss of function and strength. If the muscle loss becomes severe, it can prevent you from being able to do your usual daily activities and increase your risk of falling. Muscle loss typically starts at age 30, and gets worse as we get older. The good news is you can minimize this loss by eating a healthy diet with adequate protein and getting regular physical activity that includes strength exercises.

Protein on your plate

Here are some quick and easy ways to boost your protein throughout the day.

Breakfast

- Enjoy cottage cheese with fruit.
- Add peanut butter, nuts, or seeds to oatmeal.
- Eggs are quick and easy, and they can be enjoyed in many forms.
- Protein powder can be added to smoothies or even coffee.

Lunch

- Add protein to a salad with canned tuna, leftover chicken, cottage cheese, eggs, nuts, or seeds.
- Mix canned tuna with hummus instead of mayo for a healthier tuna salad.

Dinner

- Add beans to soups, stews, or casseroles.
- Try quinoa as a side or part of a meatless entrée.
- Canned or frozen fish are both quick and easy options.

Snacks

- Peanut butter with apples or celery
- Cheddar cheese cubes with grapes
- Crispy roasted edamame
- Greek yogurt and fruit parfait
- A handful of nuts or seeds
- Milk is great for meals or snacks



Chili Mac and Cheese

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 Tbs oil, olive or canola
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 cup onion, diced
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 2 Tbs flour
- 2 Tbs chili powder
- 1 can (28 oz) crushed tomatoes, low sodium
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz) white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz) kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups vegetable broth, low sodium
- 2 cups uncooked whole wheat elbow macaroni
- ½ cup shredded cheese, cheddar or colby



Directions

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat, then add diced peppers and onions with garlic powder. Cook, stirring occasionally for about 2 minutes.
2. Sprinkle in the flour and chili powder and stir constantly for another 2 minutes.
3. Add in the rest of the ingredients except pasta and cheese. Stir to combine, scraping up any bits of flour from the bottom of the pot.
4. Add in the dry pasta and stir. Bring to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Let simmer for about 15 minutes, stirring often, until the pasta is cooked to your liking.

Sources:

SNAP Ed University of Connecticut

Duyff, R.L., *Complete Food & Nutrition Guide*. 2017. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.