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Introduction To Protein And High Protein Foods

Protein is an essential nutrient to keep your body functioning well. Proteins are part of every cell in your body and are needed to build and repair muscle, tissue, skin, nails and hair. Protein also helps build hormones and enzymes. Here are some tips for healthy protein choices.

What foods contain protein?

Protein is found in beans, lentils, dried peas, tofu, tempeh, edamame, nuts and seeds and their butters, fish, meat, poultry, eggs, milk, soy milk, cheese and yogurt. Small amounts of protein are also found in grains, vegetables and fruit. Eating protein from a variety of sources will help make sure you are getting other important nutrients like fibre, calcium, iron and B12.

How much protein do you need?

Adults (19 years and over) need 0.8 grams of protein for every kilogram of body weight. For example, if you weigh 68 kg (150 lbs), then you would need about 55 grams of protein per day.

Check out some of the sample meal ideas below to figure out how much protein you may be getting from some common foods.

As long as you're getting enough calories and eating a variety of protein-containing foods throughout the day, healthy adults don't usually need extra protein. There are some groups that have different protein needs such as pregnant and breastfeeding women, some athletes, older adults and people with certain health conditions. Talk to a dietitian about the amount of protein that is right for you.

Making healthy protein food choices

Protein foods should be included at every meal. Aim for $\frac{1}{4}$ (one quarter) of your meal or plate to come from protein sources.

Choose protein foods that come from plants more often. Plant-based protein foods can provide more fibre and less saturated fat than other types of protein foods. This can be beneficial for your digestive system and for promoting heart health.

Enjoy a variety of protein foods to help meet your nutrient needs.

Legumes such as beans, lentils, and soy foods like tofu are good sources of protein:

Did you grow up in a family where meat took centre stage on the dinner plate? Try having meat-free meals more often. Many of these plant sources of protein are high in fibre and low in saturated fat, so they help you stay full and keep your heart healthy.

Try nuts and seeds:

Nuts, seeds and their butters are good sources of protein and healthy monounsaturated fats. They make great afternoon snacks and yummy additions to salad, cereal and yogurt.

Eat fish more often:

Fish is a good source of protein but even more important – many types of fish are an excellent source of omega-3 fats. Regular consumption of fish with omega-3 fats can help to reduce the risk of heart disease. Examples of fish high in omega-3 fats include char, herring, mackerel, rainbow trout, salmon and sardines. Just remember to prepare your fish in a heart healthy way such as baking, broiling, grilling or poaching.

For information on fish and mercury risk visit UnlockFood.ca.

Choose lean meats and skinless poultry:

When choosing beef, look for well-trimmed eye of round or sirloin, or extra lean ground beef. Pork tenderloin or loin chops are good pork choices. Remove the skin from chicken or turkey, as the skin is high in saturated fat. Avoid drowning your meat or poultry in high fat sauces such as cream, gravy and butter. Try marinades made with lemon, garlic, yogurt and herbs and spices to get maximum flavour.

Heart healthy cooking methods include: baking, broiling, grilling, roasting and barbequing.

How much proteins do vegetarians need?

People often think that being a vegetarian or vegan means that it can be hard to get enough protein. Not true! There are many vegetarian sources of protein like beans, lentils, dried peas, tofu, tempeh, nuts and seeds. Eggs, low-fat cheese, yogurt and milk are also good sources of protein for vegetarians who eat these foods. Vegetables and grain products also contain small amounts of protein too.

Vegetarian diets have been linked to lower risk for heart disease and some types of cancer. Even if you're not a vegetarian try having a meal centred on plant sources of protein at least once a week.

Need some ideas for getting more plant protein in your diet?

- Start your day with a whole-grain cereal or a bowl of oatmeal. Increase the flavour with some almonds or pumpkin seeds. (*1/4 cup oatmeal = 3 grams protein; 1/4 cup almonds = 8 grams protein*)
- Busy morning? Make your own protein bars the night before for a portable breakfast. (*1 bar = 7 grams protein*)
- Add chickpeas, lentils or black beans to your soup or salad at lunch. (*3/4 cup black beans = 11 grams protein; 3/4 cup lentils = 13 grams protein*)
- Cook up a big bowl of bean rich chili that's loaded with vegetables. (*1 serving = 14 grams protein*)
- Choose whole grain breads and crackers with sliced cheese (*1 slice bread = 3 grams protein; 50 grams cheese = 12 grams protein*)
- Great pre or post exercise snacks are mini-yogurt or cottage cheese cups. (*3/4 cup yogurt = 8 grams protein*)
- Need an afternoon pick-me-up? Try peanut butter on whole grain bread with a glass of milk or soy beverage. (*2 tablespoon peanut butter = 7 grams protein*)
- Try a tofu stir-fry loaded with vegetables and flavoured with sweet chilli sauce. (*3/4 cup tofu = 16 grams protein*)
- Try a quinoa salad instead of pasta. Quinoa is a whole grain that is also a source of protein. (*1/2 cup quinoa = 3 grams protein*)

For recipe ideas, visit Cookspiration.com.

How can a dietitian help?

A dietitian can work with you to make sure you are getting enough protein to meet your unique needs and goals. They can suggest ways to incorporate more plant-based protein foods into your diet. Dietitians consider your lifestyle, culture, health conditions, food skills, budget and preferences to give you personalized guidance. Most employee benefit plans cover dietitian services. Connect with a dietitian today!

Bottom line

Including a variety of protein sources at every meal will help ensure you get enough protein and other important nutrients. Choose plant-based sources of protein more often to promote heart health. Some people need different amounts of protein than the average adult, connect with a dietitian if you have questions about how much protein is best for you.

Visit www.NutritionMonth2023.ca for more on how to connect with a dietitian and for trusted food and nutrition information.