

PROTEIN: SMART CHOICES FOR EVERYONE

For Cost-Conscious Consumers

Why protein?

Protein plays a big role in helping you and your family stay healthy. Protein supplies what's needed to build and repair body tissues like muscles and bones. People often think of meat, chicken and fish as best sources of protein, but dairy foods are also excellent choices. Milk has other great nutritional benefits because it is packed with vitamins and nutrients like calcium, vitamins A and D, potassium, phosphorus and magnesium.

What are affordable protein choices?

You can feed your family healthfully and inexpensively. High-quality protein choices include milk (8 grams of protein per cup) and eggs (6 grams of protein per egg). Stretch your food dollar by buying a whole chicken for both light and dark meat.

Why is protein important at breakfast?

It is important to start the day with high-quality protein such as an egg, a container of yogurt or milk in cereal. Protein at breakfast helps you think more clearly and be more alert to do well at work or at school.

What about lactose intolerance?

The natural sugar in milk is called lactose. If it is hard for you to digest, you can still enjoy dairy!

- Try *lactose-free milk*. It's regular milk with the lactose removed.
- *Yogurt* contains helpful bacteria that break down lactose.
- *Hard cheeses* contain little or no lactose.

How much protein?

Aim for 20 to 30 grams of protein per meal plus smaller amounts of protein at snacks.

What does the milk container date mean?

Although some people think the date printed on the milk container is an expiration date or a use-by date, in fact, it's the milk's sell-by date. It's safe to drink your milk past that date if it's been stored properly (in your refrigerator at 38 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit). If it passes a quick sniff test, you can confidently drink milk past the sell-by date.

Eat protein throughout the day for:

Stable energy. Protein at each meal and snack helps your body have stable energy during the day. Protein does this by preventing blood sugar highs and lows.

Strong bones. Calcium and vitamin D are important for bones, but protein is also needed.

Strong body. Everyone—kids, parents and grandparents—needs protein for healthy, strong muscles.

Combine food groups to add protein to meals or snacks:

Grains or Protein +	Dairy +	Fruit or Vegetables
Scrambled egg	Cheese	Canned tomatoes + green peppers
Canned or cooked dry beans	Plain yogurt	Shredded zucchini
Oatmeal	Made with milk	Raisins + bananas
Granola	Cottage cheese	Canned peaches

SMART SHOPPING FOR PROTEIN FOODS

Low-fat dairy

Penny for penny, milk is one of the best protein sources in the store. A cup of milk is only about \$0.25 and contains 8 grams of protein. A large tub of plain yogurt goes farther than individual yogurt containers; sweeten it with dried or fresh fruit.

Canned and dry beans

Canned beans, such as black or garbanzo, are inexpensive protein sources; just drain and rinse to remove extra sodium. Dry beans such as pintos are easy to cook by boiling on the stove; just follow instructions on the package. Make extra and freeze some for later.



Overnight Apple Cinnamon Oatmeal Breakfast Custard

A protein-packed oatmeal can energize your day.

4 servings

4 cups fat-free milk
2 cups oats (quick or old-fashioned)
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 apple, cored and chopped (unpeeled)
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
3 eggs, beaten



1. The night before serving, combine milk, oats, sugar, cinnamon and apple in a saucepan. Cover pot and refrigerate overnight.
2. In the morning, remove pot from refrigerator and stir. Replace cover and heat over medium-low heat for about 4 minutes until creamy, stirring occasionally to prevent from sticking.
3. Add vanilla and eggs; stir constantly with a fork until eggs are no longer shiny and are cooked, about 1 to 2 minutes.

Notes:

Can be made in the morning without combining overnight; cook milk/oats mixture a little longer, about 5 to 6 minutes. Stir frequently to prevent sticking.

This recipe can easily be adjusted down to 2 servings or up to 5 or 6 or more. Just follow this simple formula: For each serving, use one cup milk, ½ cup oats and one LESS egg than the number of servings (i.e., one egg for 2 servings, 4 eggs for 5 servings). Add sugar, cinnamon, apples and vanilla to taste.

Nutritional analysis, per serving: 346 calories; 19 g protein; 8 g fat; 341 mg calcium; 163 mg sodium

Eggs

Brown, organic and white eggs have the same nutrition but may vary in price.

Lean meats

Tougher cuts of meat are generally cheaper and can be more tender if you cook them in a slow cooker or on the stove low and slow with liquid. Buy ground meat on sale and cook it all; then freeze in plastic zip-top bags to use in soups, stews, tacos or casseroles.

Fish

Plain frozen fish is simple to prepare by thawing, brushing with a little oil and broiling. Tuna canned in water instead of oil is a quick meal option; drain and rinse to lower the sodium.

Salsa Rice and Beans Bake

Try this super budget-friendly casserole with a Tex-Mex twist.
6 servings

4 large eggs, beaten
¾ cup low-fat milk
¾ cup salsa
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
⅓ teaspoon salt (optional)
1½ cups (6 ounces) shredded mexican blend (or Cheddar) cheese, divided
1 green or red bell pepper, finely chopped
½ cup sliced black olives (optional)
3 cups cooked brown rice
1 cup frozen corn (or drained canned corn)
1 can pinto beans, drained and rinsed in a colander (or red kidney beans)

Optional Garnishes: Plain Greek yogurt, salsa, black olives, jalapeno peppers

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Coat 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray; set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients except ½ cup cheese. Mix gently to combine.
3. Spread rice mixture in prepared baking dish and spread out evenly. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining cheese; bake 5 more minutes until cheese melts. Serve warm with optional garnishes.

Nutritional analysis, per serving: 395 calories; 21 g protein; 15 g fat; 298 mg calcium; 487 mg sodium

