

# Make Your Protein Work Harder for You

## Protein Can Help Power Your Plate and Your Lifestyle

### Maximize the power of protein

Although most Americans meet their protein needs, some people may benefit from **diets higher in protein** such as **athletes**, **aging adults** and those trying to **manage their weight**. This fact sheet will help you learn how to maximize the protein in your diet. From helping build muscle with exercise to providing easy and tasty options at meals, high-quality protein foods, such as dairy foods, can help you meet your health and wellness goals.

### FAQ:

#### What exactly is protein?

Protein is an essential nutrient (like fat and carbohydrate) your body needs each day. Not all proteins are equal – quality can make a difference. High-quality protein foods make it easy for you to get all of the essential amino acids your body needs to build and maintain muscles and help your body work properly.

#### Where can I get protein?

Protein is naturally found in animal foods and some plant foods, but the amount and quality of protein varies. The quality of protein is measured by the type and amount of amino acids it provides and by how well the body uses the protein.

#### What are high-quality proteins?

Dairy foods such as milk, flavored milk, cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt and Greek-style yogurt are good examples of high-quality protein.\* High-quality protein

provides all the essential amino acids your body can't make on its own. The high-quality protein found in foods such as dairy foods, eggs, lean beef and pork, skinless poultry, fish and soy offer convenient options to help you meet your protein needs.



#### What exactly is whey protein?

Whey protein is a high-quality protein that is naturally found in milk. It can help provide the protein your body needs each day and can be conveniently added to foods and beverages to increase the protein content.

#### What about plant proteins?

Plant proteins can help meet nutrition needs, too. But unlike animal foods, it may not be as easy because most plant foods, including many beans, peas, seeds, nuts, vegetables and grain products, do not provide the significant amounts of the essential amino acids the body needs. Therefore, a variety of plant proteins are often needed to ensure amino acid needs are met.

#### What are amino acids?

The basic structure of protein is not a single, simple substance, but a multitude of chains of amino acids, which are building blocks that help build, repair and maintain body tissues. There are a total of 21 amino acids; the body makes 12 of them, which are called nonessential amino acids, but the other 9 are called essential amino acids, because the body cannot make them so they must come from food.

**Did you know?** A little more than half of people are trying to get more protein in their diets, and about 20 percent of adults indicate they're actively doing something about it, such as checking labels or changing their eating behavior. Potentially, this could equate to more than 45 million people! Do they know something you don't? Choosing high-quality protein sources can help benefit a variety of health and wellness goals.



## Fast Facts:

- Your body uses protein all day long to actively build, repair and maintain muscle tissues. Try eating foods containing high-quality protein as an easy way to help get your protein throughout the day.
- Your protein can work better for you, if you choose high-quality sources to help ensure you get all the essential amino acids you need. Don't forget to include high-quality protein with breakfast – many people skip this important meal altogether!
- If you are planning meals with less meat, include high-quality protein such as that found in milk, cheese, yogurt or whey as a convenient way to help you get the essential amino acids your body needs.

## Did You Know?

- In addition to protein, dairy foods (milk, cheese and yogurt) are important sources of calcium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, vitamins A, D and B<sub>12</sub> and riboflavin in the U.S. diet.
- Dairy proteins are high-quality proteins that can help build and repair your muscles following a hard workout.
- **Diets higher in protein** have been shown to help slow muscle loss that occurs as you get older, help curb hunger and help maintain a healthy weight.

## Can I get high-quality protein by eating more meat, chicken, fish and dairy foods?

Yes. Healthy diets, including predominantly plant-based diets, should regularly include high-quality, lower fat sources of protein, such as low-fat and fat-free dairy foods, lean meats, chicken, fish and eggs to help you easily meet your protein needs. Find out how many servings of these types of foods are recommended each day based on your age, gender and activity level at [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov). Depending on your typical exercise routine and your age; however, you may benefit from additional protein. Eating additional servings of these foods or consuming whey protein, throughout the day, while staying within your calorie needs, are options that can help you satisfy your nutritional needs.

– Dan Benardot, PhD, RD, Professor of Nutrition, Professor of Kinesiology & Health, Georgia State University

### Protein in Common Foods

	Serving Size	Protein (grams)	Tip
Milk	1 cup	8-10	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties, including flavored or lactose-free options.
Cheese, such as Cheddar	1.5 oz.	9-11	Choose reduced-fat or low-fat cheese.
Cottage cheese	½ cup	13	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Greek-style yogurt	6 oz.	14-18	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Traditional yogurt	6 oz.	5-7	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Lean beef	3 oz.	22-27	Choose cuts with round or loin in the name, such as sirloin, round tip, tenderloin and top round.
Lean pork	3 oz.	24-26	Choose cuts with loin in the name, such as tenderloin, top loin and Canadian bacon.
Lean poultry	3 oz.	25-26	Choose breast meat, and remove the skin before eating.
Seafood and fresh water fish	3 oz.	18-22	
Eggs	1 large	6	
Beans	½ cup	7-8	Choose beans such as kidney or pinto.
Nuts	1 oz.	6-8	
Peanut butter	2 Tbsp.	8	
Tofu	3 oz.	6	

For illustration purposes only. Check the nutrition label for product-specific protein content.

➤ Get recipes that include protein at [wheyprotein.nationaldairyCouncil.org](http://wheyprotein.nationaldairyCouncil.org) and [nationaldairyCouncil.org](http://nationaldairyCouncil.org).

\*Look for products containing 5 grams or more of protein per serving.