

# Protein in the Diet

## What is protein?

Proteins are a kind of building block found in every cell of your body. Your body uses protein to build and repair skin, muscles, and organs. Protein is found in foods such as meats, poultry, fish, beans, soy products, nuts, and seeds. You can tell how much protein is in a food by reading the nutrition facts food label.

## How much protein do I need?

The amount of protein you need to eat depends on your age, gender, and level of physical activity

### Women

- 19 to 30 years old 5½ ounces\*\*
- 31 to 50 years old 5 ounces\*\*
- Over 51 years old 5 ounces\*\*

### Men

- 19 to 30 years old 6½ ounces\*\*
- 31 to 50 years old 6 ounces\*\*
- Over 51 years old 5½ ounces\*\*

#### **\*\*An ounce in this list is equal to:**

- 1 ounce of meat, poultry or fish
- 1/4 cup cooked beans
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds

As a general rule, you should get 10% to 35% of your total daily calories from protein.

## How do proteins fit into a weight-loss program?

Eating a very high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet may lead to faster weight loss than a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods. However, very high protein diets often lack important nutrients and fiber, and they can be high in unhealthy fats. These diets can also be hard to follow for a long time.

The healthiest weight loss diets include a variety of foods with a focus on low-calorie, less processed, high-fiber foods with low amounts of saturated fat.

## How can I eat the right proteins?

It is important to choose carefully which proteins you eat. Eating too much meat can lead to high cholesterol levels or diseases such as gout. A high-protein diet can also put a strain on your kidneys.

Here are some ideas for getting enough protein without getting too much fat:

- Buy only lean cuts of meat, such as chicken or turkey breast without skin; pork tenderloin; flank, round or sirloin beef; and low-sodium ham.
- Snack on nuts and seeds such as raw almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds, or pumpkin seeds. Be careful not to eat too many, because nuts and seeds are high in fat.
- Try soy products such as tofu, tempeh, and soy milk.
- Cook lean. Bake, broil, grill, steam, or microwave meats instead of frying them.
- If you eat a lot of meat, cut back at each meal for several days. The goal is to limit meat to 2 servings per day, with each serving being about 3 to 4 ounces, which is the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand.
- Have 2 or more meals each week that do not include meat. Increase servings of vegetables, rice, pasta, and beans in all meals. Try casseroles, pasta, and stir-fry dishes that have less meat and more vegetables, grains, and beans.
- Eat broiled or grilled fish, such as salmon or tuna, at least 2 times a week.
- Fast food can be very high in total fat, saturated fat, and trans fat. If you eat fast food, choose grilled chicken or a salad with fat-free or low-fat dressing. Ask for nutrition information from fast-food restaurants so that you can choose wisely.

For more information check with:

- The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
800-366-1655  
<http://www.eatright.org>
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans  
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm>

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