

Protein: Be Strong, Be Active

For Active Older Adults

Why protein?

Protein is an important building block of strong muscles and bones to keep the body active throughout life. Although people typically think of meat and beans as sources of protein, dairy foods are excellent choices. Milk, yogurt and cheese are rich in high-quality protein, and they also contain other essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamins A and D, potassium, phosphorus and magnesium.



How much protein?

Aim for 20 to 30 grams of protein per meal plus smaller amounts of protein at snacks. Most adults need at least 50 grams of protein throughout the day. However, research shows that more can be beneficial. It's easy to reach this amount of protein by following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans' recommendation of 3 daily servings of low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt or cheese.

What about lactose intolerance?

People who are lactose intolerant can still enjoy dairy!

- Try *lactose-free milk*. It's still milk, but without lactose.
- *Yogurt* contains helpful bacteria that break down lactose, making it easy to digest.
- *Hard cheeses* contain little or no lactose.

Eat protein throughout the day for:

- **More energy.** Eating protein at each meal and snack helps keep blood sugar, and therefore energy levels, constant throughout the day.
- **Appetite control.** Protein every few hours helps keep hunger in check.
- **Stronger bones.** Calcium and vitamin D are important for strong bones, but protein is also essential.
- **Muscle maintenance.** Higher protein intake may help combat muscle loss, which is estimated to be 1 or 2 percent each year after age 50. Protein and exercise together help build and repair muscle, which is crucial for staying fit for everyday activities.

Do all milks contain the same amount of protein?

Milk naturally contains 8 grams of high-quality protein per cup regardless of fat content. The amount of protein in milk alternatives such as almond or rice varies widely depending on the ingredients added in processing, so it's important to read the labels to compare.

Which foods contain protein?

16-22 grams per serving	11-15 grams per serving	6-10 grams per serving	2-5 grams per serving
Beef, chicken, pork, turkey (3 ounces)	Fish and shellfish (3 ounces)	Milk (1 cup) or yogurt (6-ounce carton)	Brown rice (1 cup cooked)
Deli meat (3 ounces)	Beans and lentils (¼ cup)	Cheese (1½ ounces)	Oatmeal (1 cup cooked)
Greek yogurt (6-ounce carton)	2 eggs	Nuts, small handful (¼ cup)	Broccoli, chopped (1 cup cooked)
Meal replacement bar with whey protein	Cottage cheese (½ cup)	Tofu (½ cup)	Whole-grain bread (1 slice)

When is the best time to eat protein?

New research shows that spreading protein intake evenly throughout the day is better for muscle growth and repair. It's important to start the day with high-quality protein such as an egg, a carton of yogurt, milk in cereal or a latte. Protein at breakfast helps the brain think more clearly and be more alert for work or play.



Stay-Strong Meal Ideas

Breakfast

Egg Mmmuffin – Whole-wheat English muffin + egg + slice Canadian bacon + slice low-fat cheese.

Power Oatmeal – Oatmeal made with milk instead of water + dried fruit + nuts.

Lunch

Loaded Baked Potato – Baked potato + cottage cheese + cooked fresh/frozen broccoli or chili beans.

Salsa Beans + Rice – Canned/cooked pinto beans + brown rice + plain yogurt + salsa + salad.

Herbed Chicken/Tuna Salad – Canned chicken or tuna + plain Greek yogurt + dried/fresh oregano over lettuce and veggie salad.



Dinner

Chili Mac – Chili beans + cooked whole-grain macaroni noodles + shredded cheese + plain yogurt (yogurt has more protein and calcium than sour cream).

Breakfast for dinner – Add shredded cheddar cheese to pancake or waffle mix; top with applesauce + plain yogurt.

Snacks

Nutrition Drink – Instead of buying nutrition shakes in the supplement aisle of the store, make your own: 1 cup low-fat milk + 1 tablespoon chocolate syrup (or cocoa powder) + ½ frozen banana + ½ cup fat-free dry milk powder. Blend in blender. Add ice; blend again.

Nuts + Fruit – ¼ cup peanuts or almonds + ¼ cup dried fruit.

Sweet Potato Chili

This chili can be adapted to your preference for spiciness; this recipe uses creamy Greek yogurt instead of sour cream for added nutrition.

6 servings



- 1 pound ground Beef (95 percent lean)
- 1 tablespoon canola Oil
- 1 medium Onion, chopped
- 1 medium green Bell pepper, chopped, divided
- 1 tablespoon Chili powder (or more for spice)
- ¼ teaspoon smoked Paprika (or ½ teaspoon for more spice)
- 1 ½ teaspoons dried Oregano leaves, crushed
- ½ teaspoon ground black Pepper
- ¼ teaspoon Salt
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) no-salt-added diced Tomatoes, undrained
- 1 can (8 ounces) Tomato sauce
- 1 can (15.5 ounces) Chili beans or red Kidney beans, undrained
- 1 medium Sweet potato, peeled, diced into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup frozen Corn
- 1 ½ cups (6 ounces) shredded reduced-fat cheddar Cheese
- 1 container (6 ounces) plain Greek yogurt

1. In a very large pot or stockpot, brown ground beef over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is no longer pink, breaking up into small crumbles. Remove from stockpot with slotted spoon onto a paper-towel-lined plate to absorb drippings. Set aside. Pour drippings out of stockpot.
2. In same stockpot, heat oil over medium heat until hot. Add onion and green pepper; cook and stir 5 to 7 minutes or until onion is tender. Add in chili powder, paprika, oregano, pepper and salt; cook and stir 2 minutes. Add 2 cups water; cook and scrape up any brown bits on the bottom of pan.
3. Scrape beef crumbles back into stockpot. Add tomatoes, sauce, beans, sweet potato and corn; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer 10 to 15 minutes until sweet potato is tender. Uncover and serve or continue cooking uncovered for a thicker chili.
4. To serve, top each bowl of chili with cheese and Greek yogurt.

Nutritional analysis, per serving: 389 calories; 36 gm protein; 10 gm fat; 252 mg calcium; 871 mg sodium

Blueberry Cobbler Breakfast Bar

Bursting with blueberries and whole-grain goodness—and packed with dairy protein—this baked oatmeal is sturdy enough to be cut into squares and eaten on the go. It's even good enough for dessert.

4 large breakfast servings; 6 dessert servings



- 2 cups Oats (quick or old-fashioned)
- ¾ teaspoon Cinnamon
- ¼ cup packed Brown sugar
- 1 ½ cups low-fat Milk
- 2 large Eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon Vanilla extract
- 2 cups frozen Blueberries (or fresh berries)
- Topping:* ½ cup vanilla-flavored Greek yogurt

Preheat oven to 325°. Coat 9-by-9-inch baking dish with cooking spray; set aside.

1. In a large bowl, combine oats, cinnamon and brown sugar; set aside. In a smaller bowl, combine milk, eggs and vanilla; pour over oats mixture. Stir gently to combine; add blueberries and stir.
2. Pour into prepared baking dish and spread out evenly. Bake for 55 to 60 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes out clean.
3. Bars may be served warm, room temperature or cold. To serve, cut into bars and top with yogurt.

Nutritional analysis, per serving: 382 calories; 17 gm protein; 8 gm fat; 204 mg calcium; 108 mg sodium