

PROTEIN

Why it is important and where to find it

This leaflet has been created to provide information about the importance of eating enough protein and about how to get enough protein from your diet.

Protein plays an important role in your body:

- keeping muscles strong
- repairing injuries such as wounds and broken bones
- supporting our immune system to fight infections

A daily intake of protein from regular meals and snacks can help keep us in the best of health.

Eating too little protein, particularly for long periods of time, may lead to muscle weakness, frailty and slow recovery from illness and injury.

As we get older, our bodies don't use the protein we eat as well as they used to, so we need to eat more protein to help overcome this. Illnesses and long term conditions such as cancer, COPD, pressure ulcers and recovery from surgery also increase our need for protein.

Foods high in protein should be included in 2 or 3 meals each day. If your appetite is poor, eating 3 smaller meals along with snacks or milky drinks in between may be easier to manage.

Good sources of protein include meat, fish, eggs, and dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese.

Plant-based sources of protein include soy and tofu, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds (see pages 2 & 3).

Tips for increasing your protein intake

- Try to have a portion of poultry, meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses or cheese at each meal. If you are vegetarian/vegan, there are more ideas on plant-based protein foods you can include at each meal (see page 3 for further ideas)
- Try to have a milky dessert such as yogurt, custard or rice pudding after or between your meals
- Use fortified milk for drinks and on cereals - to make fortified milk: take 4 heaped tablespoons of skimmed milk powder, mix to paste with a small amount of milk then whisk into a pint of milk
- Choose drinks such as milk, hot chocolate or malted drinks made with milk (these all count as fluid but are more nourishing than other fluids such as water, squash and tea).
- Some products, for example yogurts, ice cream, plant-based milks (e.g. nut and oat milks), bread, pasta and cereals, have extra protein added to their ingredients - look out for the words "high protein" on the label
- If you are struggling with your appetite or are worried you aren't getting enough protein from your food, speak to your doctor, nurse or a dietitian who will be able to give you more advice.
- In some cases your healthcare professional may prescribe oral nutritional supplements to help. For more information about getting the most from your food and oral nutritional supplements, visit www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers

How much protein is in your food?

The table below includes some examples of protein rich foods. Try to include a portion of protein at each meal.

Food	Average portions	Approximate protein content
Meat and fish		
Chicken breast	grilled breast without skin (100g)	32g
Bolognese sauce, made with extra lean minced beef	240g	31g
Lamb chop	1 chop (70g)	20g
Sausage, thick pork	2 sausages (80g)	10g
Bacon back, grilled	2 rashers (50g)	12g
Tinned tuna in oil	small can (100g drained)	25g
Tinned sardines in oil	small can (100g drained)	24g
Battered cod	1 fillet (180g)	25g
Prawn cocktail	88g	6g
Eggs and dairy foods		
Egg	1 medium (50g)	10g
Cheddar cheese	2 slices (40g)	10g
Yogurt, whole, plain	1 pot (125g)	7g
Milky puddings (rice pudding/custard)	1 pot (120g)	5g
Skimmed milk powder	1 heaped tablespoon (13g)	5g
Milk, semi-skimmed	100ml	4g
Plant based proteins		
Tofu	80g	19g
Quorn	100g	13g
Roasted peanuts	1 bag (50g)	13g
Baked beans	1 small can (150g)	8g
Chickpeas	1 tablespoon (40g)	3g
Lentils - green	1 tablespoon (40g)	4g
Peanut butter	1 portion pack (25g)	6g

- Average portion sizes taken from *The Foods Standards Agency Food Portion Sizes Book*.
- Please note protein contents of different brands of foods may vary

Meal ideas for plenty of protein

Breakfast ideas

MEAT	FISH	VEGETARIAN	VEGAN
1 scrambled egg with 2 slices of bacon	2 kipper fillets with bread & butter	Scrambled eggs on toast or porridge or cereal with fortified milk	Vegan peanut butter on toast

Lunch ideas

MEAT	FISH	VEGETARIAN	VEGAN
Ham & cheese omelette or cold ham & cheese ploughman's or chicken sandwich	Sardines on toast or sandwiches: - smoked salmon & cream cheese - tuna mayonnaise - prawn cocktail	Cheese omelette or bean soup with grated cheese or cheese on toast or sandwiches: - egg mayonnaise - cheese & pickle	Baked beans & vegan cheese on toast or sandwiches: - hummous & carrot - vegan cheese - nut butter & banana

Dinner ideas

MEAT	FISH	VEGETARIAN	VEGAN
Lamb hotpot with potatoes or beef casserole or spaghetti bolognese with grated cheese or sausage & mash with gravy or chicken pie & chips	Small fish and chips (takeaway) or fisherman's pie or tuna pasta bake or fishcakes & peas	Vegetarian lasagne or macaroni cheese or cheese & tomato pizza	Vegan bean chilli & rice or vegan lentil dahl or tofu stir fry

Snack ideas

MEAT, FISH, VEGETARIAN	VEGAN
Cheese and crackers, scotch egg, (meat or vegetarian options) cocktail sausage, (meat or vegetarian options) yogurt, custard, rice pudding, chocolate mousse, fruit posset	Nut butter & rice cakes, vegan cheese & crackers, hummous & breadsticks, vegan ice-cream

Drinks

MEAT, FISH, VEGETARIAN	VEGAN
Milky drinks: milkshake, smoothie, coffee, hot chocolate, malted drinks	Adapt with plant based milk

If you are struggling with your appetite, have a special diet or are worried you aren't getting enough protein from your food, speak to your doctor, nurse or a dietitian who will be able to advise you and can prescribe oral nutritional supplements to help, if necessary.

For more information about getting the most from your food and oral nutritional supplements, visit www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers