

# FitFacts®

## Making Healthy Protein Choices

PROTEIN IS A PRETTY BIG DEAL. IT IS PART OF EVERY CELL IN THE BODY AND IN SOME WAY, HELPS WITH EVERY ONE OF THE BODY'S FUNCTIONS. PROTEIN IS THE MAIN PART OF YOUR MUSCLES, BRAIN, NERVES, HAIR, SKIN, AND NAILS. IT KEEPS YOU HEALTHY BY FIGHTING INFECTION, PROVIDES ENERGY, AND HELPS YOU FEEL FULL IN BETWEEN MEALS.

A healthy diet includes the right amount of protein from many different foods. Here are some tips for making smart protein choices:

1. **Value variety.** Most Americans get more than enough protein in their diet. The problem is that most of this protein comes from animal sources that are high in unhealthy saturated fat. (see our Fit Fact "Fat" for more) Vary your diet by including healthier alternatives like beans, peas, and soy foods.
2. **Learn your requirement.** Multiply your weight in pounds by 0.36 and 0.45 to get a range of how many grams of protein you should eat every day (If using kg, multiply by 0.8-1 per kg). Higher amounts of protein are recommended for athletes who engage in regular endurance and strength training.\*
3. **Know your sources.** Foods high in protein include:

FOOD	SERVING SIZE	GRAMS OF PROTEIN
Most cuts of beef and fish	1 ounce	6-7
Chicken breast-grilled	1 medium sized	26
Milk	1 cup	8
Greek yogurt	¾ cup	18
Cottage cheese	½ cup	12
Egg	1 large	6
Beans (black, pinto, white, kidney)	½ cup cooked	6-8
Soy beans	½ cup cooked	15
Split peas	½ cup cooked	8
Tofu	½ cup cooked	8
Nuts (peanuts, almonds)	¼ cup	8-9
Seeds (sunflower-hulled, flax)	¼ cup	6-7

Source: [USDA's Food-a-pedia](#)

4. **Go lean with meats and dairy.** Follow these recommendations to avoid unhealthy saturated fats.
  - Choose lower-fat red meats like round or sirloin. Watch serving sizes.
  - Trim visible pieces of fat from meat and drain fat from cooked meat.

- Buy ground beef that is 90% (or more) lean.
  - Remove poultry skin.
  - Grill, broil, or bake meats instead of frying and breading them.
  - Choose lean lunch meat choices like turkey, ham, or chicken.
  - Select low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
5. **Make your meal meatless.**
    - Choose seafood instead of meat twice a week.
    - Make your main dish meat-free by experimenting with beans or peas.
  6. **Eat your eggs.** Egg yolks do contain cholesterol and saturated fat, but one egg per day does not raise your risk for heart disease. Egg whites are a great low-fat, low-calorie alternative.
  7. **Go nuts.** Add nuts and seeds to your favorite dish, salad, or snack. Nut butters are a good choice for sandwiches. This group is high in calories and fat, so watch your serving sizes.
  8. **Skip the salt.** Protein-rich foods like nuts, seeds, lunch meats, and canned beans can be high in sodium. Choose unsalted or low-sodium versions to avoid excess sodium intake.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences](#)

[United States Department of Agriculture](#)

[U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Rodriguez, N.R., DiMarco, N.M., & Langley, S. (2009). Nutrition and athletic performance. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 41(3), 709-731

\*Endurance and strength-trained athletes should consume 0.55-0.78 grams of protein per pound of body weight each day (or 1.2-1.7 g/kg).

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