

Protein and your health

Why is protein important?

Protein is an essential nutrient for your health and is found in many foods. Your body uses protein for energy and to:

- Build and repair cells like those in your muscles, hair, skin and nails
- Keep your immune system healthy
- Make enzymes and hormones

How much protein do I need?

Healthy adults aged 19 years or older need about 0.8 grams (g) of protein per kilogram (kg) of body weight each day. Follow the steps below to calculate your protein needs.

Step 1	Weight in pounds (lbs) ÷ 2.2 = weight in kg
Step 2	Weight in kg × 0.8 = approximate daily protein needs in g

For example, an adult who weighs 80 kg (176 lbs) needs about 64 g of protein each day, while an adult who weighs 65 kg (143 lbs) needs about 52 g of protein each day.

The following groups have different protein needs than what is recommended above:

- Infants, children and youth
- People who are pregnant or lactating
- Some athletes
- Individuals with certain health conditions such as sarcopenia, age-related muscle loss and weakness

Call **8-1-1** to talk with a dietitian to find out how much protein is right for you.

Which foods contain protein?

Protein is found in beans, peas and lentils, nuts and seeds, soy products like tofu and soy beverage, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, dairy products and eggs. Grains, vegetables and fruit also add small amounts of protein to your diet.

You may see food products like breakfast cereals, snack bars and milk beverages that are marketed as high protein. These generally contain dairy, egg, or plant-based ingredients to boost their protein content. Be sure to look at the product's Nutrition Facts table to choose products with less saturated fat, sugar and sodium.

Which protein foods should I eat most often?

Eat plant-based protein foods every day. They have more fibre and less saturated fat than some animal protein sources. Eating less saturated fat can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

When eating animal-based protein, choose fish and shellfish, lean cuts of meat such as pork loin, sirloin steak or inside round roast, skinless poultry, and lower fat dairy products as healthier options. Try healthy cooking methods like broiling, grilling, roasting, stir-frying or sauteing.

How can I meet my protein needs?

Most people can easily meet their protein needs through food, even when the protein is from plant sources. You do not have to combine different plant foods in a meal to get a "complete" protein. Your body will do this for you if you eat a variety of plant-based protein foods throughout the day.

Aim to fill one quarter of your plate with protein foods at all meals. You can also add a source of protein to your snacks to make them more filling. Try these tips for adding protein to your meals and snacks:

- Make hot cereal with milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage
- Pair hummus with cut-up vegetables or use it as a sandwich spread
- Add low-sodium canned beans and lentils to soups and stews
- Try a stir-fry with tofu or other soy foods like soybeans, edamame or tempeh
- Use shredded chicken, fish, pork or sliced lean meats in a sandwich or wrap
- Sprinkle nuts and seeds on cereals or salads
- Enjoy cottage cheese or Greek yogurt with fruit or in smoothies
- Have low fat cheese, nut butter or canned fish with whole grain crackers or toast
- Snack on a handful of nuts, seeds, roasted chickpeas or edamame

What about protein powder?

Most people do not need protein powder as protein needs can easily be met through food. Eating a variety of protein rich foods will help you get enough protein as well as other nutrients like iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and calcium.

If you find it hard to get enough protein from food, protein powder may be helpful. Protein powders often provide 10 to 30 g of protein per serving. Check the Nutrition Facts table on the label to find out how much protein a scoop contains.

Protein powders are often made from dairy ingredients like whey or casein, or plant-based ingredients such as soy or peas. In general, choose a simple protein powder with no extra ingredients like sweeteners, vitamins, minerals or herbal products.

How much protein do I eat?

To estimate how much protein you eat, record the amount of all foods and beverages you eat and drink in one day. Then, add up the protein you ate, using the amounts in the table below.

You can also find the protein content of a specific food on the [Canadian Nutrient File](#). For packaged foods, the amount of protein is listed on the Nutrition Fact table on the food label.

For more information

- Canada's food guide: Eat protein foods: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/healthy-eating-recommendations/eat-variety/eat-proteins.html>

Amounts of protein in food

Food	Serving Size	Approximate protein (g)
Tempeh, cooked	150 g (5 oz)	27
Meat or poultry, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	22
Fish or seafood, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	19
Pumpkin seeds	60 mL (¼ cup), 60g	17
Yogurt, Greek style	175 mL (¾ cup)	16
Cottage or ricotta cheese	125 mL (½ cup)	15
Soy burger patty	75 g (2 ½ oz)	14
Hummus	175 mL (¾ cup)	14
Hemp seeds	60 mL (¼ cup)	13
Eggs	2 medium	12
Cheese, semi-hard (cheddar, Swiss, mozzarella, Monterey)	50 g (1 ½ oz)	12
Beans, peas or lentils, cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	12
Tofu, firm or medium firm	150 g (5 oz)	12
Soy nuts	60 mL (¼ cup)	10
Cow milk	250 mL (1 cup)	9
Almonds or peanuts	60 mL (¼ cup)	8
Yogurt, regular style or kefir	175 mL (¾ cup)	7
Almond or peanut butter	30 mL (2 Tbsp)	7
Sunflower seed kernels or chia seeds	60 mL (¼ cup)	7
Fortified soy beverage	250 mL (1 cup)	7
Soy yogurt	175 mL (¾ cup)	7
Sunflower seed butter or tahini (sesame seed butter)	30 mL (2 Tbsp)	5
Bread	1 slice (35 g)	4*
Quinoa, spelt, teff or amaranth, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	5
Cashews, walnuts, pecans or hazelnuts	60 mL (¼ cup)	5
Pasta or noodles, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	4
Cereals, hot, cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	4
Cereals, cold	30 g	3*
Rice, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	3
Fortified plant-based beverages (almond, cashew, rice, coconut)	250 mL (1 cup)	1
Vegetables	125 mL (½ cup) or 250 mL (1 cup) leafy greens	1
Fruit	1 whole fruit or 125 mL (½ cup)	1

g = gram, mL = millilitre, Tbsp = tablespoon

Source: [Canadian Nutrient File](#)

*Check the nutrition facts table on the food label as products vary in protein content