

Protein: The Building Block of Life

Did you know that your hair and nails are mostly made of protein? Proteins are the building block of bones, muscles, cartilage, skin and blood. You need protein in your diet to help your body build and repair tissues, make enzymes, hormones, and antibodies. However, not every protein is created equal. Processed meats such as hot dogs and deli meats are linked to conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers. Here you will find healthy protein options. Like everything else, it is important to vary our protein sources to improve our nutrient intake and maximize health benefits.

*Protein should represent about 10 to 35% of your daily calories, depending on your overall health and activity level. Ask your [amwell Registered Dietitian](#) for more specific recommendations!

Protein Sources	Tips
Meats	Choose lean or low-fat cuts like round, top sirloin, tenderloin, and ground beef that is at least 93% lean. Trim away any visible fat.
Deli meats	Look for options free of added nitrates or nitrites and lower in sodium (read the label). Turkey, ham or roast beef are better choices than salami, bologna or pastrami. They are lower in sodium, calories and fat.
Poultry	Boneless skinless chicken breasts and turkey cutlets are the leanest poultry choices. Skinless chicken thighs are another good option - trim away any visible fat. This will reduce your saturated fat intake which can increase cholesterol levels and risk for heart disease.
Seafood	Aim to eat seafood twice a week. The American Heart Association recommends a 3.5 oz. serving cooked (or about ¾ cup of flaked fish), preferably oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, sardines, and albacore tuna — which are all high in omega-3 fatty acids. Grilled shrimp and fish like mahi mahi and yellow tail are also great options for fish tacos or in a salad!
Egg	Eggs are nutritional powerhouses and great as part of breakfast, in a salad, or as a snack! One large egg has 13 essential vitamins and minerals (mostly in the yolk), six grams of protein (60% from the whites and 40% from the yolks) and all nine essential amino acids — all for only 70 calories!
Plant protein	Try beans and peas (kidney, pinto, black, or white beans; split peas; chickpeas; hummus), soy products (tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers), nuts, and seeds. They are naturally low in saturated fat and high in fiber.
Nuts and seeds	Choose unsalted nuts or seeds as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes. Good examples include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazel nuts, macadamias, pecans, pistachios, walnuts, flaxseeds, chia, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds. Nut butters such as almond and peanut are also great sources. The USDA recommends eating 1.5 oz. (about a handful) daily or 1-2 Tbsp. of nut butters.
Dairy	Dairy products like milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese, are good sources of calcium, which helps maintain bone density and reduces the risk of fractures. Greek yogurt is also a good option— it has more protein than regular yogurt and contains probiotics that help with gut health. You can eat it alone or add it to other dishes like smoothies or use it as a substitute for cream in recipes. Avoid flavored versions, which are high in sugar.
Protein powder	Protein powders are a quick way to meet your daily needs especially when you're crunched on time. Options can come from milk (whey or casein), eggs, or plants (soybeans, peas, rice, potatoes, or hemp). Avoid those that have extra calories per serving (try to stick with 100-130 kcal/serving), added sugars, heavy metals (arsenic, cadmium, lead), thickeners (xanthan gum, carrageenan), fillers (dextrins), and artificial sweeteners (sucralose, saccharin) in the ingredient list.

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