

Protein



Protein-rich foods are an essential part of a balanced diet. An adequate intake of quality protein supports the growth, maintenance and repair of all our cells, including muscle, bones, skin and hair. It is key for gut integrity and the normal functioning of muscles, the communication between nerves, the movement of vitamins, minerals, fats and oxygen around the body, the creation of hormones and enzymes, the ability of the blood to clot and the immune system to fight infections. Protein is also a source of energy and when included at every meal supports satiety helping to manage weight and maintains energy levels throughout the day by regulating blood sugar levels.

When we eat protein, our stomach acid and digestive enzymes break it down into a number of amino acids. Some of these amino acids are considered essential as they cannot be made by the body. Most animal sources of protein (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy) include all the essential amino acids. Plant-based protein sources (grains, beans/ legumes, nuts and seeds) are often called incomplete proteins as they often lack one or more. This is not a problem and can be easily overcome by eating a variety of plant-based protein sources from the three groups above each day or two to get all the essential amino acids. Check out [this article](#) for more info on plant protein.



Protein Quality

Animal protein, such as that found in meat, seafood, dairy and eggs, is considered “high quality” protein as it is high in all of the nine essential amino acids. These types of protein sources are also digested more fully by the body whereas the digestibility of plant-based sources can vary between 70 and 90%. This can be easily overcome, however, by increasing your protein intake if you are on a mostly plant-based diet and incorporating ways of improving digestibility by, for example, soaking nuts and seeds. Protein quality should also take into consideration choosing the least processed and non-GMO options as well as free-range, grass-fed and/or organic animal protein sources.



Protein Requirements

Protein requirements depends on age and gender. Individuals who are very physically active, are pregnant or breast-feeding, injured and undergoing wound healing, or who have certain medical conditions may need more protein. The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) lists requirements in more detail.



As a general rule of thumb, adults should aim for one gram of protein for every kilogram of bodyweight. It is recommended to vary the source of protein and spread it out throughout the day by including some at every meal, especially breakfast and lunch.



Consult with a holistic nutritionist if you are concerned about your intake and/or your digestive and absorptive capacity of this essential nutrient.

Good sources of high-quality protein

Fish: Most seafood is high in protein and low in saturated fat. Fish such as salmon, sardines, anchovies, and herring are also high in omega-3 fatty acids.

Poultry and eggs: Removing the skin from chicken and turkey can substantially reduce the saturated fat. Opt for organic and free-range if possible to reduce exposure to antibiotics and other environmental toxins.

Beans: Beans and peas are full of both protein and fiber. Add them to salads, soups and stews to boost your protein intake.

If using dried legumes (except lentils) make sure you soak them overnight then rinse thoroughly before cooking to improve their digestibility. Try adding beans to meat dishes (half and half) to boost nutritional value but also to make meals more budget-friendly.

Nuts, seeds and pseudo grains: As well as being rich sources of protein, nuts and seeds are also high in fiber and “good” fats. Add to salads or keep handy for snacks. Chia seeds and quinoa are unique in that they contain all the essential amino acids making them a complete protein.

Tofu: Non-GMO tofu and fermented soy products such as tempeh are excellent red meat alternatives, high in protein and low in fat. Avoid soy based products like soy sausages as these contain many unhealthy additives (check labels).

Dairy products: Milk, cheese, and yoghurt offer lots of healthy protein. Beware of added sugar in low-fat yoghurts and flavored milk, though, and skip processed cheese as it often contains many unwanted additives. Be mindful that some people are unable to digest lactose in dairy products and others can feel a bit congested.

Red meat: Included once or twice a week, red meat is also a great source of iron and zinc. Choose grass-fed and free-range or organic if possible and choose healthier cooking methods such as stewed, stir-fried and included in soups and curries.

Dietary protein sources

	Protein	Serving
Salmon	19g	85g
Prawns	20g	85g
Chicken breast, no skin	27g	80g
Lean beef, sirloin steak	25g	85g
Tuna, canned in water	22.4g	95g
Eggs	6g	1 large
Cottage cheese	28g	1/2 cup
Cheddar cheese	10g	40g (2 slices)
Greek yoghurt	28.5g	1 cup
Dairy milk, whole	8g	1 cup
Almond milk, plain	1.4g	1 cup
Soy milk, regular	6.4g	1 cup
Oat milk	4.7g	1 cup
Oats, raw	12.5g	95g (1 cup)
Brown rice, cooked	4.5g	1 cup
Quinoa, cooked	8g	1 cup
Lentils, boiled	18g	1 cup
Tofu, firm, raw	22g	1/2 cup (126g)
Tempeh, cooked	19g	100g
Almonds, unsalted, raw	6g	23 nuts (28g)
Cashews, unsalted, raw	5.7g	20 nuts (28g)
Walnuts, unsalted, raw	4.3g	14 halves (28g)
Peanuts, unsalted, raw	19g	1/2 cup
Peanut butter, no added sugar	3.9g	1 tablespoon
Pumpkin seeds	9g	1/4 cup
Sunflower seeds	5.2g	3 tablespoons
Chia seeds	4.7g	3 tablespoons
Flaxseeds/ linseeds	5.2g	3 tablespoons
Hemp seeds	9.4g	3 tablespoons
Sesame seeds	5g	3 tablespoons
Tahini	2.5g	1 tablespoon
Chickpeas, cooked	14.5g	1 cup
Kidney beans, cooked	15.3g	1 cup
White/ cannellini beans, boiled	17.4g	1 cup



Meal ideas

(Serving sizes are examples only. Use one gram of protein per kilo of your body weight to work out what you should aim for each day and spread that out over the day. For example, if you weigh 60kg, your 60g daily protein intake could include 20g at breakfast, 20g at lunch, 10g for afternoon tea and 10g at dinner. Use the table prior to estimate what that would look like.)

Breakfast

- 200g Greek yoghurt with sliced banana or berries, 1 tablespoon of chia seeds, and 1/4 cup of raw unsalted nuts.
- 1-2 boiled/ scrambled eggs or sardines or canned salmon, 1/2 avocado, sauteed kale and mushrooms on sourdough with a side of rocket drizzled with lemon juice.
- banana smoothie on plant milk with 1 tablespoon of nut butter, 1/2 avocado and 1 tablespoon of carob/ cacao powder.
- blender pancakes: blend 1 egg, 1 cup of rolled oats, 1 teaspoon of baking soda, 1 banana, 1/4 cup of ricotta, 1 tablespoon of dessicated coconut and enough plant milk for a smooth consistency. Cook in a fry pan with coconut oil.

Lunch and dinner

- 150g chicken breast/ fish/ lean beef with 1-2 cups of non-starchy vegetables/ salad greens with a 1/2 cup of rice, whole-grains or starchy vegetables such as potato/ sweet potato/ pumpkin.
- 1/2 cup vegetable protein (lentils, beans, tofu) with 1-2 cups of non-starchy vegetables/ salad greens/ raw rainbow coloured vegetables plus 1/4 cup seeds/ 1/4 avocado/ 1 tablespoon of cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil.
- click on the links below for some ideas

[chicken meal ideas](#)

[seafood meal ideas](#)

[red meat meal ideas](#)

[vegetarian meal ideas](#)

Snacks

- 1/4 cup of raw unsalted nuts and seeds
- celery sticks and 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- carrot sticks and 2 tablespoons of hummus
- apple slices with 1 tablespoon almond butter and sprinkle of cinnamon
- 3 tablespoons cottage cheese or a boiled egg on brown rice cakes
- green smoothie with 1 scoop natural protein powder