

Protein

What Does Protein Do?

Protein is one of the three main building blocks of food, along with carbohydrate and fat. It plays many important roles in your body:

- **Protein builds.** Throughout life, you need protein to build cells, tissues, and muscles. During times of growth, such as infancy, childhood, and pregnancy, protein is especially important.
- **Protein repairs.** Protein helps your body heal cuts and wounds.
- **Protein protects.** Protein helps your immune system build antibodies that protect you from disease.

How Much Protein Do You Need?

Here are some general guidelines for the amount of protein that most healthy people need each day. If you have certain medical conditions, you may need more or less protein. Check with your doctor or dietitian to find out how much protein you need.

- Teenage boys (ages 14–18 years): 52 grams (g) protein per day
- Men (ages 19 years and older): 56 g protein per day
- Teenage girls and women (ages 14 years and older): 46 g protein per day
- Pregnant or nursing teenagers and women: 71 g protein per day

Does Eating Extra Protein Make You Stronger?

Eating extra protein does not directly increase the size or strength of your muscles. Exercise strengthens muscles. The amount of protein in a typical diet is usually enough to build cells and tissue.

Going Lean with Protein

Some foods with protein are high in saturated fat. Eating too much saturated fat can increase the risk of heart disease or stroke.

To avoid saturated fat, it is important to choose low-fat (lean) protein foods. These tips can help:

- Choose lean cuts of beef, such as loin, sirloin, round, and chuck.
- Choose ground beef labeled as at least 90% lean.
- Remove skin from poultry before eating.
- Trim fat from meats before cooking.
- Broil, grill, microwave, roast, poach, or boil meats instead of frying.
- Drain off the fat when browning ground meats.
- Avoid breading, which adds fats and calories.
- Cook dry beans, peas, and lentils without adding animal fats, like lard or ham hocks.
- Choose lean lunchmeats, such as turkey, ham, and roast beef. Avoid regular bologna or salami.



Which Foods Have Protein?

Food	Serving Size	Protein (grams)
Cottage cheese	1 cup	28
Ricotta cheese	1 cup	28
Beef, fish, pork, chicken, or turkey	3 ounces	21
Vegetarian burger	1 patty	10–15
Tofu	½ cup	13
Soy milk	1 cup	9
Milk (all types, including chocolate milk)	1 cup	8
Yogurt	6 ounces	8
Cooked dried beans, peas, or lentils	½ cup	8
Peanut butter or other nut spread	2 tablespoons	8
Cheese	1 ounce (1 slice)	7
Egg	1 large	6
Nuts or seeds	2 tablespoons	3–5
Bread	1 slice	2
Cooked cereals, pasta, rice, or vegetables	½ cup	2