

The importance of protein in your diet

Protein is one of the major energy giving nutrients. Protein plays many vital roles in maintaining our health this includes maintaining muscle strength, wound healing, making new cells and repairing old. Protein also plays a vital role in making hormones and enzymes which carry out key functions.

Protein requirements

The amount of protein we need changes in different stages of our life time. Older people may require more protein due to risks of sarcopenia (muscle wasting). Furthermore, there may be other factors present which may increase protein requirements, e.g. Illnesses and long term conditions such as cancer, COPD, pressure ulcers and recovery from surgery.

Older people are advised to consume protein as 1-1.5g/kg body weight each day (ESPEN) due to reduced mobility, ageing, reduced immune function and metabolic changes which can impair wound healing and the ability to fight infection.

Protein requirements can be as high as 2g/kg body weight in severe illnesses.

What are the main sources of protein in diet?

Good sources of protein include meat, fish, eggs, and dairy foods, such as milk, yoghurt and cheese. Plant-based sources of protein include soy and tofu, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds.

Ways to increase protein in your diet

If you have any renal problems (CKD Stage 4 or higher), please check with your GP/renal consultant or dietitian if it is safe to have a high protein diet.

- Fill at least a quarter of your plate with protein foods at every meal
- Use dairy more frequently, e.g. using milk instead of water in cooking and drinks
- Have a milky dessert, such as yogurts/ custards, after meals
- Add beans, pulses, lentils and peas to casseroles and soups
- Add nuts and seeds to salads, pasta and yoghurt, couscous, porridge, and other grains
- Try nut butters on toast, muffins, crumpets, sauces, waffles and pancakes
- Add skimmed milk powder to milk drinks, porridge, mashed potato, sauces and soups
- Add cheese to mashed potato, sauces, vegetables, salad, scrambled eggs, and omelettes, etc.
- Look for the “high protein” labels when grocery shopping
- Choose sandwich fillings that are protein-rich, such as ham, chicken, egg and tuna

Protein content of commonly used foods

Food	Quantity	Protein
Beef mince	140g	28g
Battered cod	180g	25g
Tinned tuna in oil	100g drained	25g
Salmon	100g	23g
Lamb chop	70g	20g
Tofu	80g	19g
Quorn	100g	13g
Roasted peanuts	1 bag (50g)	13g
Chicken breast	1 slice (40g)	10.9g

Food	Quantity	Protein
Cheddar cheese	2 slices (40g)	10g
Cow's milk	Half pint	10g
Soya milk	Half pint	9g
Baked beans	1 small can (150g)	8g
Yoghurt	1 pot (125g)	7g
Egg	One	7g
Peanut butter	25g	6g
Lentils - green	1 tbsp (40g)	4g

High protein meal ideas

Breakfast

- Eggs – scrambled, poached, fried or omelette
- Porridge made with milk, topped with nuts and seeds
- Granola or muesli with extra nuts, seeds and yoghurt
- Nut butters on toast
- Beans on toast
- Bacon or sausage with tomato or beans
- Fruit with yoghurt, nuts and seeds

Snack time

- Nuts and seeds
- Yoghurt, especially Greek yoghurt/Skyr
- Cheese and biscuits
- Houmous with bread or vegetables
- Small pot of custard
- Cereal bar containing nuts and seeds/some labelled 'high protein'
- Boiled egg

Lunch and dinner

Include a portion at each meal (palm sized/20g) of meats or plant alternatives, such as:

- 1 chicken breast
- 1 fish fillet
- 3 eggs
- 100g mince
- 170g tofu
- 250g beans.

Drinks

- 1 pint of milk (add skim milk powder 4 level tablespoons (24g) for making fortified milk)
- Milky drinks, such as hot chocolate/ Horlicks/ Ovaltine/ milkshakes/ milky coffee
- Yoghurt drinks
- Smoothies made with fruit and yogurts
- Yoghurt (125g)

