

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Protein and Good Nutrition

Nutrition and Meal Management | Nutrition Needs

Purpose: This handout provides the nutritional benefits of protein foods for children.

The protein food group includes foods from animal and plant sources. There are multiple subgroups of proteins, which include: seafood, meats, poultry, eggs, nuts, seeds, soy products, beans, peas, and lentils. Beans, peas, and lentils are considered both a vegetable and a protein. Operators are encouraged to offer nuts, seeds, and their butters in their most nutrient-dense form, without added sugars and salt.

Protein is a building block for bones, muscles, cartilage, skin, and blood. Consuming protein-rich foods provides the body with B vitamins, selenium, choline, phosphorus, zinc, copper, vitamin D, and vitamin E. Because the nutrients in proteins are not all the same, it is important to eat a variety of protein. For example, poultry provides the most niacin, meats provide the most zinc, and seafood provides the most vitamin B12 and vitamin D.

According to MyPlate (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/protein-foods>) the recommendation for protein foods is determined by your age and sex. Examine the table below to find your appropriate amount of protein for one day.

Daily Recommendation* in Ounce-Equivalents (oz eq)		
Children	2-3 yrs	2 oz eq
	4-8 yrs	4 oz eq
Girls	9-13 yrs	5 oz eq
	14-18 yrs	5 oz eq
Boys	9-13 yrs	5 oz eq
	14-18 yrs	6½ oz eq
Women	19-30 yrs	5½ oz eq
	31-50 yrs	5 oz eq
	51+ yrs	5 oz eq
Men	19-30 yrs	6½ oz eq
	31-50 yrs	6 oz eq
	51+ yrs	5½ oz eq

In order to understand a proper serving of protein, it is necessary to determine what an ounce equivalent is. Let's look at some common protein portions and their ounce equivalents.

Ounce-Equivalent (oz eq) of Protein Foods		
	Amount that counts as 1 oz equiv in the Protein Foods Group	Common portions and oz equiv
Meats	1 ounce cooked lean beef 1 ounce cooked lean pork or ham	1 small steak (eye of round, filet) = 3½ to 4 oz eq 1 small lean hamburger = 2 to 3 oz eq
Poultry	1 ounce cooked chicken or turkey, without skin 1 sandwich slice of turkey (4½" x 2½" x ⅛")	1 small chicken breast half = 3 oz eq ½ Cornish game hen = 4 oz eq
Seafood	1 ounce cooked fish or shell fish	1 can of tuna, drained = 3 to 4 oz eq 1 salmon steak = 4 to 6 oz eq 1 small trout = 3 oz eq

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Protein and Good Nutrition

Nutrition and Meal Management |
Nutrition Needs

Eggs	1 egg	3 egg whites = 2 oz eq 3 egg yolks = 1 oz eq
Nuts and seeds	½ ounce of nuts (12 almonds, 24 pistachios, 7 walnut halves) ½ ounce of seeds (pumpkin, sunflower, or squash seeds, hulled, roasted) 1 Tablespoon of peanut butter or almond butter	1 ounce of nuts or seeds = 2 oz equiv
Beans, peas, and lentils	¼ cup of cooked beans (such as black, kidney, pinto, or white beans) ¼ cup of cooked peas (such as chickpeas, cowpeas, lentils, or split peas) ¼ cup of baked beans, refried beans ¼ cup (about 2 ounces) of tofu 1 ounce tempeh, cooked ¼ cup roasted soybeans 1 falafel patty (2 ¼", 4 oz) 2 Tablespoons hummus	1 cup split pea soup = 1 oz equiv 1 cup lentil soup = 2 oz equiv 1 cup bean soup = ¾ oz equiv 1 soy or bean burger patty = 2 oz equiv

A variety of proteins should be encouraged. Seafood, poultry, and meat alternates are lower in saturated fat compared to beef, pork, and lamb. Beans, peas, lentils, and seafood are the main protein groups that are under-consumed by Americans. Cheese, yogurt, and other dairy products are considered meat alternates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). These products provide a source of protein and calcium, which helps maintain strong bones. Aim to meet the daily recommendations of protein intake according to the Dietary Guidelines and add more variety.

Tips for Success

- Incorporate seafood into meals.
- Use meat alternates regularly (cheese, tofu, beans, peas, lentils, yogurt, nuts, seeds, and nut butters).
- Add nuts and seeds to mixed dishes.
- Choose unsalted nuts as a snack, on salads, or in mixed dishes.
- Use lean meats and poultry when cooking.
- Choose low-fat cooking methods, such as baking and broiling, when preparing foods.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label to find the fat, sodium, and protein content of the product.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label when comparing two or more products to make the best choice.

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Protein and Good Nutrition

Nutrition and Meal Management | Nutrition Needs

Reference

- All about the Protein Foods Group.* (2016). www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/protein-foods
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