



Nutrition Basics

Protein and Dairy

Chapter 3, Lesson 1

Protein: The basic building block

Protein foods are an important source of nutrients that are vital for good health. In addition to providing protein which is the building blocks of bones, muscle, cartilage, skin, blood, hormones, and vitamins, these foods also supply the body with B vitamins, iron, zinc, and magnesium. B vitamins and magnesium help the body release energy, iron carries oxygen in the blood, and zinc helps the immune system function properly.



At each meal, $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate should be protein

Why it is important?

- Builds, maintains and repairs body tissues such as muscles and skin
- Creates enzymes and some hormones
- Important for building antibodies, necessary for a healthy immune system
- Helps boost your energy

Adding healthy protein to your diet

Aim to get your protein from a variety of sources.

Try these tips:

- **Choose lean meats** (such as sirloin or round steaks), skinless chicken breasts, pork loin or tenderloin and eggs; trim any skin or visible fat before cooking
- **Eat seafood**—such as salmon or trout—twice a week
- **Opt for plant-based proteins** to boost your eating habits and nutrients like tofu, hummus, veggie burgers, legumes, seeds, beans and nuts

Dairy

Eating dairy products promotes good bone health, which may reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Dairy foods provide you with essential nutrients like protein, calcium, potassium and vitamin D.

Consuming lower-fat dairy is important because full-fat versions are higher in saturated fat, which can raise “bad” (LDL) cholesterol levels and negatively affect your health.

This food group includes:

- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese
- Fortified soy products



Tips for choosing low-fat dairy options

- If you usually drink whole milk, gradually switch to reduced fat milk (2%), then low-fat milk (1%), and then fat-free milk (skim)
- Eat fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack or add it to smoothies
- Use fat-free (skim) milk in your coffee
- Top chili or soup with shredded, reduced fat cheese

Next Steps

1. Watch Lesson 2: The Best and Worst Protein Sources to Eat
2. Take Chapter 3 Quiz

Sources

United States Department of Agriculture (2020). Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf