



Where's the Beef?: Six Alternate Sources of Protein

Protein is an essential nutrient, and is necessary for building and maintaining healthy tissue and strong bones and muscles. Along with fat and carbohydrate it also provides the calories our bodies need for energy.

Say “protein” and most people think of a nice juicy steak. Although meat – in particular red meat – is a good source of protein, it’s also high in saturated fats which can raise LDL (bad) cholesterol, clogging arteries and potentially leading to heart disease. You may not even realize foods other than meat can contain significant amounts of protein – but they do!

If you’re eating an average 2000-calorie diet and about 15–20% of your calories are coming from protein, you’ll need about 75–100 grams of protein a day. There are plenty of protein options to enjoy for breakfast, lunch, dinner and mid-day snack, too. Many of these foods are plant based, and bundle a good dose of protein with a host of vitamins, nutrients, fiber and other heart-healthy benefits as well.

The following are six non-meat protein sources that are healthy and easy to incorporate into a balanced diet:

Beans

Dried or canned, beans are a delicious and versatile way to get your daily intake of protein; they’re also full of fiber and are cholesterol and fat free. One cup of beans has as much protein as two ounces of beef, chicken or fish. Enjoy a bowl of chili or slather hummus on vegetables to get your beans.

Nuts

Eating peanuts and tree nuts like walnuts, almonds, and pistachios can be good for your heart. In addition to protein, walnuts contain omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, and vitamin E. And, one ounce of almonds gives you six grams of protein, nearly as much protein as one ounce of broiled rib-eye steak. (For an even healthier option, choose lightly-salted or unsalted nuts).

Whole Grains

Yes, whole grains, such as quinoa, barley, brown rice, and oats, are not only a source of fiber and other nutrients, they contain protein, too! Though each grain varies in protein content, one serving (a little less than one cup of cooked grain) provides four to six grams of protein.

Non-fat, Plain Greek Yogurt

Enjoy plain yogurt by adding your own fruit or nuts for a protein-packed breakfast or mid-day snack. The average six-ounce container of yogurt provides 17 grams of protein and is a source of calcium to boot.

Eggs

Eggs can be enjoyed any time of day: scramble an egg or two for breakfast, pack a hard-boiled egg in your lunchbox, rustle up a frittata for dinner – or bake a custard for dessert! One large egg provides six grams of protein, as well as 11 essential vitamins and minerals, including vitamins D and B-12, and choline.

Canned Tuna, Salmon, Herring or Sardines

In addition to vitamins, minerals and omega-3 fatty acids, these fatty fish are an excellent source of protein. A three-ounce serving of canned tuna, for example, provides 25 grams of protein!



Next time you think “protein” think of these six easy sources. Who knew that getting our daily protein requirements could be so simple?