

Protein Basics



What is protein?

Protein is an essential nutrient your body needs each day. While children need protein to grow, everyone uses protein to help their body repair cells and make new ones.

While all protein is good, not all proteins are equal; quality can make a difference. High-quality protein provides the building blocks of protein, called essential amino acids, that the body can't make on its own.

How much protein do kids need?

- The Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for protein are based on body weight and include age-related adjustments for the extra protein needed for growth.
- A good rule of thumb is about ½ gram per pound of body weight for growing kids: ages 1-14 years for girls, and ages 1-18 for boys.
- Girls ages 15 and over, as well as boys ages 18 and over, need about ⅓ gram of protein per pound of body weight—the same as adults.

Where can you get protein?

Protein is found naturally in animal foods and some plant foods. However, the amount and quality of protein varies. Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt are good examples of high-quality protein.* Other high-quality protein foods include eggs, beef, pork, poultry, fish and soy. These foods offer convenient options to help your family meet their protein needs.

Get recipes that include protein by visiting the “Recipes” section of wheyprotein.nationaldairycouncil.org and nationaldairycouncil.org.

Protein in Common Foods

For illustration purposes only. Check the nutrition label for product-specific protein content.

	Serving Size	Protein (grams)	Tip
Milk	1 cup	8-10	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties, including flavored or lactose-free options.
Cheese, such as Cheddar	1.5 oz.	9-11	Choose reduced-fat or low-fat cheese.
Cottage cheese	½ cup	13	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Greek-style yogurt	6 oz.	14-18	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Traditional yogurt	6 oz.	5-7	Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties.
Lean beef	3 oz.	22-27	Choose cuts with round or loin in the name, such as sirloin, round tip, tenderloin and top round.
Lean pork	3 oz.	24-26	Choose cuts with loin in the name, such as tenderloin, top loin and Canadian bacon.
Lean poultry	3 oz.	25-26	Choose breast meat, and remove the skin before eating.
Seafood and fresh water fish	3 oz.	18-22	
Eggs	1 large	6	
Beans	½ cup	7-8	Choose beans such as kidney or pinto.
Nuts	1 oz.	6-8	
Peanut butter	2 Tbsp.	8	
Tofu	3 oz.	6	

*Look for products containing five grams or more of protein per serving.

