Putting MyPlate on Your Table: Protein

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MyPlate, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food guidance system, helps individuals use the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans to make smart choices from every food group. MyPlate includes an interactive, online guide that provides individuals with recommended food amounts to eat, based on gender, age and physical activity level. Personalized guides and other resources can be found at choosemyplate.gov.

This fact sheet provides an introduction to the protein food group.

Choose Lean and Varied Protein Sources.

Most Americans eat enough foods from the protein group, but could benefit from making leaner and healthier choices.

Some foods in this group are high in saturated fat, including fatty cuts of beef, pork and lamb; regular (75% to 85% lean) ground beef; regular sausages, hot dogs and bacon; and some luncheon meats such as salami and bologna. In addition, many processed meats contain nitrates and high levels of sodium. To help maintain a healthy body weight and keep blood cholesterol levels healthy, these foods should be limited.

Healthier protein sources include lean meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, soy products, beans, peas, nuts and nut butters, and seeds.

How Much Is Needed From the Protein Group?

This chart shows the USDA’s daily recommendation for protein intake. Remember, when eating meat, it is important to focus on leaner cuts, which tend to be lower in saturated fat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>2–3 years old</th>
<th>4–8 years old</th>
<th>2-ounce equivalents</th>
<th>4-ounce equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>9–18 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>5-ounce equivalents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9–13 years old</td>
<td>14–18 years old</td>
<td>5-ounce equivalents</td>
<td>6½-ounce equivalents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19–30 years old</td>
<td>31+ years old</td>
<td>5½-ounce equivalents</td>
<td>5-ounce equivalents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>19–30 years old</td>
<td>31–50 years old</td>
<td>6½-ounce equivalents</td>
<td>6-ounce equivalents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51+ years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>5½-ounce equivalents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note these 1-ounce protein equivalents:

- ¼ cup cooked kidney, black or garbanzo beans
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter

Why Protein?

Foods in this group provide protein and other nutrients that are necessary for good health. Proteins help build and maintain body tissues like bones, muscles, skin and blood. They are also the building blocks for enzymes, hormones and vitamins. Other nutrients commonly supplied by foods in the protein group include B vitamins, iron, vitamin E, magnesium and zinc.

Which Foods Are in the Protein Group?

Foods in the protein group include meat, poultry, seafood, beans, peas, eggs, soy products, nuts and seeds.
• 1 ounce cooked lean beef (a small hamburger equals 3 ounces)
• 1 ounce cooked chicken (a small chicken breast equals 3 ounces)
• 1 ounce tuna fish (one small can tuna equals 3 ounces)
• 1 egg
• 1 sandwich slice of turkey
• 1 ounce tofu (¼ cup equals 2 ounces)
• 1 ounce tempeh (¼ cup equals 2 ounces)
• ¼ cup roasted soybeans
• 2 tablespoons hummus
• ½ ounce nuts or seeds

Tips for Getting Protein on Your Table
• Choose seafood-rich omega-3 fatty acids at least twice a week. Ideas include:
  * grilled or canned salmon salad
  * baked trout
  * white albacore tuna sandwiches
  * sardines on whole grain crackers
• Choose beans, peas or soy products as a main or side dish often. Ideas include:
  * chili made with kidney or black beans
  * stir-fry with veggies and tofu
  * lentil or minestrone soup
  * black bean quesadillas
  * chickpeas or kidney beans on a salad
  * black bean, chickpea or soy veggie burgers
  * hummus with vegetables or on sandwiches
• Choose unsalted nuts or seeds as a snack, on salads or in main dishes. Ideas include:
  * pine nuts, almonds or cashews in pesto sauce for pasta or pizza
  * rice pilaf with almonds
  * vegetable stir-fry with toasted peanuts
  * salads topped with walnuts or pecans
  * apples or celery dipped into natural peanut butter

References