
Nutrition and MyPlate: Protein Foods

This group includes foods that are high in protein. Protein helps the body build new cells and keeps tissues healthy. Most Americans get enough protein without even trying. It can be harder for vegetarians or vegans. But plenty of nonmeat foods are rich in protein, too. It's best to get protein from a variety of sources.

Nutrient-rich choices

There's a lot more to this food group than just meat and beans. It also includes fish, soy, nuts, seeds, and eggs. There are all sorts of nutrient-rich choices:

- Chicken and turkey with the skin removed
- Fish and shellfish
- Lean beef, pork, or lamb (without visible fat)
- Soy products, such as tofu, soybeans (edamame), tempeh, or soymilk
- Black beans, kidney beans, pinto beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), and lentils. Beans, lentils, and peas count as both a protein and a vegetable.
- Peanuts, almonds, walnuts, sesame seeds, and sunflower seeds, as well as foods made from these such as peanut butter or tahini
- Eggs and foods made with eggs such as quiche or frittata

What makes meat and beans less healthy?

- Fatty meat is not healthy. Before you cook meat, trim off all the fat you can see. Chicken and turkey skin is also high in fat and should be removed before cooking.
- Breading and frying make food less healthy. This includes dishes like fried chicken, fried fish, and refried beans.
- Sausage and lunch meats tend to be high in fat and salt. Buy low-fat, low-sodium versions.

One small change

Make a meal that includes a nonmeat source of protein such as tofu, lentils, or any other food listed above. Have a better idea? Write it here:
