

MAY 2024

FOODS IN FRONT

A Monthly Newsletter by the CMH Dietitians

All about protein: Support your health, weight management, and more



Why is protein important?

Protein serves our bodies in many different ways. It helps to transport nutrients to cells and organs, supports our metabolism and cell structure, and, most noticeable to us in daily life, it impacts muscle and body composition.

It's also one of the only three macronutrients - carbohydrates, fats, and proteins, which make up all of the calories in the food that we eat.

If we are not eating enough protein in our daily diet, our bodies *still* need a minimum amount of protein to function correctly. So where does it get this protein from? It might break down muscle in the body, to use that protein for other uses - leaving you with less strength, less muscle tone, and a higher proportion of fat versus muscle in your body. What's more, muscle uses more energy (calories) to maintain itself, so if you lose some muscle, your metabolism may burn less calories overall, leading to weight gain down the road.

On the other hand, what does getting *enough* protein do for us? It maintains the muscle that we have, even during times of weight maintenance or weight loss. It can also let us build new muscle when we exercise, especially regular strength training. When we build more muscle, that muscle uses more energy (calories) to function, leading to an increase in our overall metabolism and a better opportunity for weight loss in the long term.

How much protein should I eat?

- First, calculate your bodyweight in kilograms. (your weight in pounds / 2.2)
- To maintain the muscle that you have, multiply this number by 0.8.

You'll need between 0.8 and 1x your bodyweight (in kilograms) to generally maintain in everyday life.(1)

If you want to build *new* muscle to improve your body composition, lose weight in the future, or build overall strength in your muscle and bone, you may need more protein than this general recommendation - up to 1.2 to 1.6x your bodyweight in kg. Talk to your dietitian about the protein goal that is right for you.

1. Dietary Reference Intakes, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/10490>

What foods have the most protein?

Animal food sources tend to have the most concentrated protein per serving. Aim for the routine proteins in your week to be lean protein sources (naturally lower in saturated fats), like the following:

- Poultry (chicken, turkey)
- Fish (salmon, tuna, cod, albacore, tilapia)
- Pork tenderloin
- Low fat dairy (Greek yogurt, milk, cottage cheese)
- Eggs and egg whites

Use higher-fat animal proteins for a special occasion, such as:

- Beef (steak, ground beef, burgers, roast beef)
- Most cuts of pork
- Any highly processed sources of protein, such as fried chicken, bacon, or fried fish

What if I don't want to eat meat?

Plant based foods are another great source of protein, and are heart-healthy too. Try adding some of these foods in your weekly menu:

- Tofu
- Tempeh
- Seitan
- Legumes (beans, peas, lentils, and chickpeas)
- Soybeans
- Nuts



May recipes

This month, try new protein foods each week to switch up your lunches and dinners.

Crispy tofu stir-fry

Makes 4 servings



Ingredients:

- 1lb block **firm tofu**
- 1.5 Tbsp **soy sauce**
- 1 Tbsp **canola oil**
- 32oz bag **frozen stir-fry vegetables**
- **Garlic powder**
- **Onion powder**
- **Salt & pepper**
- 2 oz low-sugar **stir-fry sauce** (G Hughes, Kikkoman)
- Starch of choice: white rice, brown rice, lo mein noodles, etc.

Directions:

1. Cut tofu into ~1 inch cubes and toss with canola oil, salt and pepper.
2. Place on an aluminum-lined baking sheet and broil on high for 10 minutes.
3. Flip the tofu and broil on the other side for another 10 minutes. Then remove from oven.
4. While tofu is cooking, toss frozen vegetables in canola oil, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder.
5. Add vegetables to a nonstick pan on medium-high and sauté for 3-5 minutes or until tender.
6. Add crispy tofu to mixture in pan, then pour stir-fry sauce over and mix well to coat.
7. Serve stir-fry over your choice of a starch: rice, noodles, etc.

Lemon cod sheet pan dinner

Makes 2 servings



Ingredients:

- 2 cups **potatoes**, chopped into 1/2-3/4 inch pieces
- 1 cup sliced **carrots**
- 1 cup thickly-sliced **zucchini**
- 1/4 cup **olive oil**
- Lemon juice squeezed from **1 lemon**
- 1 Tbsp **white wine vinegar**
- **Garlic powder**
- **Dried thyme**
- **Salt and pepper** to taste
- 2 large **cod fillets**

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. In a bowl, mix together olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper.
3. Spread the potatoes, carrots, and zucchini on a foil-lined baking sheet and drizzle *half* of the olive oil mixture over it, spreading well to coat the veggies.
4. Bake in oven for 20 minutes.
5. Remove from oven, and spread out vegetables to make room for cod in the middle. Add raw cod to the center of the baking dish.
6. Pour the rest of the olive oil mixture over the cod, and sprinkle with salt and pepper.
7. Place pan in oven once again for an additional 12-15 minutes of baking, until cod is finished.
8. Remove from oven, serve and enjoy.