

National Nutrition Month 2017—Put Your Best Fork Forward



This year's official National Nutrition Month theme is "Put Your Best Fork Forward". This message challenges us to start with small changes toward a

healthful eating style- one forkful at a time. Today we will focus on the plentiful protein choices in our diet. Protein is extremely important for the human body, and actually, it's part of every cell. You must consume protein because it is one of the key nutrients needed by your body along with fats and carbohydrates. Your body breaks down food containing protein which in turn is used to support various bodily functions.

Sources of Protein

It is important to keep protein foods in your daily menu. There are many protein options available. The protein group consists of meat, poultry, seafood, beans/peas, eggs, dairy, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds. Meats and dairy are the most concentrated sources of protein. Our grains, legumes, and vegetables contribute smaller amounts of protein. Fruits contain almost no protein.

Health Benefits

A major role of protein is to build and repair muscle tissue. It is also needed for proper growth and development of children. Protein helps the immune system stay strong. It can assist with hunger regulation. Your bones, blood, skin, nails, and hair all

require adequate protein intake. When choosing your protein foods, try to limit foods that are high in saturated fat, such as cheese, whole milk, poultry skin, and fatty meats. Diets high in saturated fat may contribute to the development of heart disease. Choosing more plant based proteins, such as soy, legumes, and nuts, may be heart protective.

There are many other nutrients found in protein-containing foods. These nutrients include the B vitamins, vitamin E, iron, zinc, and magnesium. All of these nutrients have special benefits for our body. For instance, iron plays a role in carrying oxygen in our blood. Beans and peas are also an excellent source of dietary fiber.

Daily Recommendations

The recommended daily amount of protein that a person needs varies based upon their level of physical activity, age, and gender. These recommendations are based upon adults who are near an average weight with an activity level of approximately 30 minutes a day. Adults should work towards getting 10%-35% of their daily calories from protein-rich foods. For example, a woman consuming 2000 calories per day who is aiming for 20% of her calories from protein would need 100 grams of protein per day.



Affordable Proteins

Protein foods can be a significant part of your food budget. For those looking to save money, there are many affordable protein-rich foods available. Alternative non-animal sources are almonds, peanut butter, legumes, and tofu. Some fish is inexpensive and can be purchased year round, such as canned tuna or cod fillet. There are also varieties of red meat that

are inexpensive, such as ground beef or cube steak. In the poultry family, choose chicken legs or thighs instead of chicken breast. Don't forget dairy! Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, and milk are also great sources of affordable proteins.

On the Go

Great alternatives to a sit down meal are a protein shake or bar. At almost any local grocery store you will be able to find snack bars available containing whole grain oats, wholesome peanuts, almonds and other assortments of nuts.



Chocolate Banana Peanut Butter Protein Shake

Allrecipes.com

- 6 ice cubes
- 1 cup milk
- 1 banana
- 1 scoop chocolate-flavored protein powder
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder

Directions

Blend all ingredients together until smooth.

Another dish the whole family can enjoy!

Skillet Tuna Noodle Casserole

Eatingwell.com

- 8 ounces whole-wheat egg noodles
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 8 ounces mushrooms, sliced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 cups nonfat milk
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 12 ounces canned chunk light tuna drained
- 1 cup frozen peas, thawed
- 1 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- ½ cup coarse dry whole-wheat breadcrumbs



Directions

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook noodles until just tender, 6 to 8 minutes or according to package directions. Drain and rinse.
2. Position rack in upper third of oven and preheat broiler.
3. Heat oil in a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, mushrooms and salt and cook, stirring often, until the onion is softened but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add wine and cook until evaporated, 4 to 5 minutes. Sprinkle flour over the vegetables; stir to coat. Add milk and pepper and bring to a simmer, stirring constantly. Stir in tuna, peas and ½ cup Parmesan until evenly incorporated. Then, stir in the noodles (the pan will be very full). Remove from the heat.
4. Sprinkle the casserole with breadcrumbs and the remaining ½ cup Parmesan. Broil until bubbly and lightly browned on top, 3 to 4 minutes.

The Bottom Line

Eating a varied diet that includes whole grains, vegetables and fruits as well as protein-filled foods will help balance your body's needs. As you can see, there are many tasty and healthy ways to build protein into your diet. Whether it's a scrumptious piping hot entrée or a refreshing dairy shake, proteins can easily complement any main meal or snack. Hopefully you've picked up a tidbit or two about the power of protein. You can continue to explore more protein possibilities by visiting: <http://choosemyplate.gov> or <http://eatright.org>

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).