

Protein in common foods

For people with cancer

Why is protein important?

Getting enough protein can help you:

- maintain your muscle mass and strength
- maintain your weight
- build a healthy immune system
- heal and get better faster





How much protein do I need?





During cancer treatment and recovery, your protein needs may be higher than usual. **Try to eat one high-protein food at each meal and snack.** Talk to a dietitian if you want to know how many grams of protein you need each day.

What foods have protein?

High-protein foods include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, legumes, soy, nuts, and seeds. Grain products have a small amount of protein. Fruits and vegetables have almost no protein.

If you are having trouble eating enough high-protein foods, you can try using protein supplements like protein powder or skim milk powder. Protein supplements can be added to liquids or soft foods, like mashed potatoes, oatmeal, or congee, to increase the protein in that food.

| Type of food | Food examples | Serving size | Average protein (grams) |
|---|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Meat and poultry (cooked)  | chicken, turkey, beef, pork, lamb, veal, wild game | 3 oz. (85 g) | 24 |
| Fish and shellfish (cooked)  | salmon, snapper, rainbow trout, tuna, whitefish, halibut, shrimp, scallops, canned fish | 3 oz. or ½ can (85 g) | 21 |
| | crab, lobster | 3 oz. (85 g) | 15 |
| Legumes (cooked or canned)  | lentils, chickpeas, split peas, black beans, kidney beans, navy beans | ¾ cup (175 ml) | 11 |
| | hummus | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 4 |
| Eggs and dairy  | eggs | 2 large | 12 |
| | cheddar, mozzarella, goat cheese | 1 ½ oz. (42 g) | 12 |
| | yogurt (Greek or Icelandic) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 12 |
| | cow's milk | 1 cup (250 ml) | 9 |
| | paneer, halloumi cheese | 1 ½ oz. (42 g) | 9 |
| | skim milk powder | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 9 |
| | kefir | 1 cup (250 ml) | 8 |
| | milkshake | 1 cup (250 ml) | 6 |
| | yogurt (regular) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 6 |

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| Soy and plant-based choices  | tempeh | ¾ cup (150 g) | 28 |
| | soybeans (boiled) | ¾ cup (175 ml) | 21 |
| | tofu (firm) | ¾ cup (150 g) | 12 |
| | texturized vegetable protein (TVP®) | ½ cup (125 mL) | 12 |
| | soy milk, pea milk | 1 cup (250 ml) | 8 |
| | tofu (soft) | ¾ cup (150 g) | 7 |
| | almond, rice, or coconut milk | 1 cup (250 ml) | 1 or less |
| Nuts and seeds (shelled)  | hemp hearts | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 13 |
| | pumpkin seeds, squash seeds | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 9 |
| | almonds, peanuts, pistachios | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 7 |
| | peanut butter, almond butter | 2 Tbsp. (30 ml) | 7 |
| | sunflower seeds | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 6 |
| | cashews, walnuts, pine nuts | ¼ cup (60 ml) | 5 |
| | tahini | 2 Tbsp. (30 ml) | 5 |
| Nutrition supplements  | pea protein powder | ¼ cup (60 ml) | About 25 |
| | whey protein powder | ¼ cup (60 ml) | About 19 |
| | oral nutrition supplement drinks | 1 bottle (235 mL) | 9 – 22 |
| Grains  | bagel (white) | ½ medium (50 g) | 6 |
| | naan (white) | ½ small (45 g) | 5 |
| | English muffin | 1 muffin (57 g) | 5 |
| | oatmeal (cooked) | ¾ cup (175 ml) | 4 |
| | pasta (cooked) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 4 |
| | quinoa (cooked) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 4 |
| | matzo (plain) | 1 cracker (28 g) | 3 |
| | bulgur, couscous (cooked) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 3 |
| | bread (all kinds) | 1 slice (26 g) | 3 |
| | pita (white or whole wheat) | ½ large (32 g) | 3 |
| | tortilla (white, whole wheat, or corn) | 1 small (34 g) | 2 |
| | barley, rice (white or brown, cooked) | ½ cup (125 ml) | 2 |
| | creamy wheat cereal | ¾ cup (175 mL) | 2 |
| Fruits and vegetables | almost no protein | | |

Note: This is not a full list of food items.

If you are a patient at the Odette Cancer Centre and you would like more nutrition information, please visit the Patient & Family Support office on TG 230 (T-wing, ground floor, room 230), call 416-480-4623, or visit [sunnybrook.ca/cancernutrition](https://www.sunnybrook.ca/cancernutrition)

This resource should be used for information and does not replace medical advice. For questions, concerns, or additional information, contact your dietitian. This resource is for personal use only.