

“LEAN” PROTEIN SOURCES



Protein is one of three primary macronutrients. The other two are carbohydrates and fats. For optimal health, you need all three each day. There are many sources of protein—some are leaner than others. Some protein sources come from meat and some from plants. While it is possible to get adequate protein from vegetable sources alone—for most people it will be more challenging. To simplify, here’s a quick list of “leaner” proteins from both sources to get you started.

Poultry: Turkey, chicken, and ostrich breast, thighs, and wings. *Darker meat has higher iron content.

Fish: Shellfish, salmon, herring, cod, albacore tuna, and sardines. These cold-water fish also contain higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids that are beneficial for reducing inflammation and good for your heart. **(We are only talking about “protein” amounts in fish—not mercury contamination, so be aware that some types of fish are not recommended for routine consumption especially if pregnant.)*

Beef: Eye of round, tri tip, sirloin, top round, sirloin tip, and bottom round roast.

Eggs: Whole eggs or egg whites only. The Mayo Clinic cites that four eggs with yolks a week is safe. A single whole egg has 6 grams of protein, or 4 grams without the yolk. **(Note latest research is indicating that cholesterol problems are likely caused by inflammation—not predominately by eating foods with higher amounts of cholesterol.)*

Pork: Loin chops, tenderloin, center loin, and boneless top loin.

Wild Game: Venison, bison (one of highest protein and leanest meats available), elk, etc. Wild game fowl like pheasant, etc. can also be good lean sources of protein.

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Vegetables: Beans, lentils, peas, spinach, and broccoli. Soybeans have a high protein level at 29 grams per cooked cup compared to spinach (5g per cooked cup) or broccoli (4g per cooked cup). Tofu made from soybeans is about 11g of protein per four ounces.

Seeds & Nuts: This food source is primarily a fat source rather than a protein source, but here are a few options that are better sources of protein than other seeds and nuts.

- **Quinoa:** Commonly referred to as a grain, but quinoa is actually the seed of a plant. Unlike other “grains,” quinoa is in a class of its own because it is a *complete protein*. It also doubles as a good complex carbohydrate.
- **Hemp:** Comes in the form of seeds and are complete proteins.
- **Edamame:** Green immature seeds of soybeans. They are complete proteins that are high in fiber, iron, vitamin K, B vitamins, and calcium.
- **Peanuts & Almonds:** Higher amounts of protein per serving than many other nuts. ¼ cup of Peanuts (9g) and ¼ cup of almonds (8g).

Dairy: Milk is more of a carbohydrate than a fat or protein, so while it contains protein, milk should not be considered as a good “lean protein” source. However, there are some forms of dairy besides milk that can be included on our “lean” protein list.

- **Whey:** Derived from liquid byproducts of cheese production, this form of protein is also rapidly absorbed and often comes in the form of protein powders or is contained in protein supplements.
- **Greek Yogurt:** This version of yogurt has far less lactose and sugar due to its straining process making it much leaner than regular yogurts. **Greek yogurt has 2-3X the amount of protein as regular yogurt.*

Protein Percentages in Daily Diet: This will vary by person and the amount of lean mass they carry in pounds, but normal populations can safely consume *up to* 30% of daily calories in the form of protein. “Higher” amounts of protein seem to be helping people more with weight management, fat loss, and lean muscle gains, etc. If 30% is high for you, start much lower then increase as needed. Some will use higher than 30%, but these people would fall into special populations like extreme athletes or clinical cases beyond the scope of general health and wellness.



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