



# Anchor Your Plate with Protein

For the growing athlete, protein is a key component of a balanced, strength-promoting diet.<sup>1</sup> It provides the building blocks for growth and maintenance of tissues like lean muscle mass.<sup>1,2</sup>

When deciding how to best fuel your growing athlete, start your planning with protein! Choose a high-quality source of protein to anchor the plate and be sure to include other nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes.

## HOW MUCH PROTEIN?

The exact amount of protein adolescent athletes need depends on a few things, like their current weight, stage of development, sex, and training regimen.<sup>14</sup> The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) provides a rough estimate for the minimal amount of protein needed by high-school aged boys and girls: 52 and 46 grams per day, respectively.<sup>5</sup> However, keep in mind that athletes may have a higher protein needs than average growing teenagers.<sup>14</sup> When considering the specialized needs of a growing athlete, a rule of thumb for protein needs is .68 grams per pound of body weight per day<sup>6</sup> (For a 150-pound athlete, this would be .68 x 150 = 102 grams of protein per day). Because many of us don't weigh out grams of protein per serving, let's see what this might look on your plate.

**FUN FACT:** Beef, and other animal proteins, are considered "high-quality" or "complete" proteins, because they contain all the essential amino acids (the building blocks of bodily proteins) needed by the human body.<sup>3</sup>

## HOW DO YOUR FAVORITE FOODS STACK UP?

Check out the standard serving sizes of these common protein foods. Mix and match protein choices throughout the day, and as a general rule of thumb, aim for 20-30 grams per meal:

PROTEIN CONTENT OF FOODS (grams, g) <sup>7</sup>		
3 oz cooked beef: 25 g	5.3 oz container of Greek yogurt: 12 g	1 oz slice cheddar cheese: 7 g
3 oz cooked chicken breast: 27 g	6 oz container of regular yogurt: 9 g	2 tbsp peanut butter: 7 g
½ cup tofu, firm: 22 g	1 cup low fat milk: 8 g	1 egg: 6 g
3 oz cooked salmon: 21 g	½ cup black, pinto beans: 8 g	20-23 almonds: 6 g
½ cup low fat cottage cheese: 14 g	1 cup quinoa: 8 g	1 egg white: 3.6 g

And remember, more protein than required isn't necessarily better. Growing athletes may need slightly more protein than inactive teens,<sup>14</sup> but too much protein crowds out other foods — like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats. Balance is essential for a healthy teen.<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT DOES 30 GRAMS OF PROTEIN FROM BEEF LOOK LIKE?

1 Burger Patty (size of a hockey puck)



1 Steak (size of a deck of cards)



If you're not sure how many grams of protein are in the food you're eating, refer to these common items to make your best guess!

*\*This is just an estimate of 30 grams of protein, actual amount of protein may vary.*

## TIPS FOR PROTEIN-RICH MEAL IDEAS

Most Americans have no problem getting enough protein at dinner time. Here are some breakfast and lunch ideas to help your athlete hit that 20-30 gram goal!

### BREAKFAST:



- Add some ground beef crumbles, black beans, and shredded reduced fat cheese to your scrambled egg bowl – include some pico de gallo or salsa for extra flavor and added variety.



- Add slices of leftover Sirloin to your egg white and cheese breakfast sandwich.



- Enjoy some cottage cheese with berries along with a slice of toast with peanut butter and banana; wash it all down with a glass of milk.

### LUNCH:



- Lay the protein foundation for your sandwich with lean Roast Beef and a slice of reduced fat cheese – enjoy on whole grain bread with lettuce, tomato, avocado and a side salad or piece of fruit.



- Try an Asian-inspired salad with Sirloin Steak, whole wheat noodles, sugar snap peas, shredded carrots, red peppers, light Asian-sesame dressing, hoisin sauce and a squeeze of lime.



- Stuff a whole wheat pita with delicious beef shawarma, hummus, low fat feta, tomato, onion, cucumber, olives and romaine lettuce, spritzed with olive oil and balsamic vinegar.

Have we left you wondering what ELSE belongs on your plate with that protein? Stay tuned for additional practical ideas and suggestions for eating with strength in mind.

### REFERENCES:

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4. Castle J, Klemm, S. How teen athletes can build muscles with protein. 2020; *How Teen Athletes Can Build Muscle with Protein* (eatright.org) Accessed Feb 28, 2022.
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6. Desbrow, B. Youth athlete development and nutrition. *Sports medicine*. 2021; 51(suppl 1):S3-S12.
7. US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service Nutrient Data Laboratory. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Version current <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/> 1079 milk; 16398 peanut butter, 20137 quinoa; 12061 almonds; 1129 hard boiled egg; 1270 cheddar cheese; 16343 pinto beans; 16426 tofu; 1016 cottage cheese; 1117 low fat yogurt; 1278 Greek yogurt; 13366 beef; 5746 chicken breast; 1521 salmon.

For more information on Beef as a source of strength, scan this code.



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