

# SHOP PROTEIN: A QUICK & EASY GUIDE

This guide provides tips for identifying protein sources and understanding nutrition labels, helping you make informed choices about the foods that best meet your needs – from every section of the grocery store.



## What is Protein and Why Does It Matter?

Protein is one of the three macronutrients that comprise the foods we eat. Made up of amino acids, it serves as the building blocks for muscles, bones, skin and blood and plays a critical role in many body processes. Eating enough protein can help support muscle maintenance and satiety.<sup>1,2</sup>

## What Foods Contain Protein?

Protein can come from plant or animal sources, but their qualities differ. Most animal proteins are considered “complete proteins” meaning that they contain all nine essential amino acids. While collagen is sourced from animals, it stands apart as an incomplete protein. Most plant proteins are not complete proteins and need to be paired with complimentary foods to create a complete protein. There are some exceptions to this, for example, quinoa, tofu, tempeh, and edamame are complete sources of plant proteins.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends choosing a variety of protein foods, including lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood, beans, peas, and lentils; and nuts; seeds and soy products.<sup>3</sup>



## What Should You Look for on a Nutrition Facts Label?

When shopping for protein sources, the nutrition facts label can be a useful tool. It lists the calories, macronutrients and micronutrients and % Daily Value (DV) in a specified serving.<sup>4</sup> For protein, the % DV tells you how much the food contributes to the daily diet based on a recommended daily value of 50 grams of protein per day.<sup>4</sup> In general, a % DV of 5% or less is low, while 20% or more is high.<sup>4</sup> While not all foods you choose may be “high”, this can be a helpful guideline to consider.

## Tips when Purchasing Protein Foods



**Opt for a variety of protein sources**



**Choose lean meats, eggs, fish, and low-fat dairy when buying animal products**



**Consider fresh, frozen, canned or tinned options**



**Buy versatile ingredients that fit your cooking style**

# Protein Foods and Ingredients

Navigating the grocery store aisles doesn't have to be complicated when searching for protein foods. Use this guide to help you stock your fridge and pantry.

*Please note, this is not an exhaustive list.*

## Eggs, Meat, Poultry & Seafood

- Eggs
- Fish
- Poultry
- Pork
- Beef

## Grains & Cereal

- Quinoa
- Seitan
- Buckwheat
- Protein cereal/granola
- Whole grain cereal

## Nuts & Seeds

- Walnuts, cashews, almonds, pistachios
- Nut butters
- Chia seeds
- Hemp seeds
- Tahini
- Flax seed

## Dairy & Dairy Alternatives

- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese
- Soy-based non-dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese)
- Cottage cheese

## Legumes

- Beans (black, kidney, garbanzo, etc.)
- Lentils
- Soybeans
- Tofu
- Tempeh
- Edamame

## Pantry & Snacks

- Protein powder
- Protein bars
- Nutritional yeast
- Jerky
- Protein canned soup
- Protein pasta

**Look for protein food options from these trusted brands:**

**Cheerios**



**PROGRESSO**

**FIBER One**

**NATURE VALLEY**

### References:

1. LaPelusa, Andrew, and Ravi Kaushik. "Physiology, Proteins." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, 2025. PubMed, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK555990/>
2. Carbone, John W, and Stefan M Pasiakos. "Dietary Protein and Muscle Mass: Translating Science to Application and Health Benefit." *Nutrients* vol. 11,5 1136. 22 May. 2019, doi:10.3390/nu11051136
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)
4. "Daily Value on the Nutrition and Supplement Facts Labels." FDA, Sept. 2024. [www.fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-facts-label/daily-value-nutrition-and-supplement-facts-labels), <https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-facts-label/daily-value-nutrition-and-supplement-facts-labels>

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