

Vary Your Protein Foods



Eating foods from all five MyPlate food groups gives your child the nutrition he or she needs to grow and be healthy. The five food groups are: Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein Foods, and Dairy.

At child care, we serve a variety of protein foods to help your child get the nutrients he or she needs for health and growth. Protein supports growing muscles. The iron in protein foods helps carry oxygen within the blood. Certain protein foods, such as seafood and nuts, contain healthy fats that support heart health.

Does my child eat enough protein?

Most preschoolers eat enough protein foods. However, children do not always eat a variety of protein foods. Offering fish or beans at some meals during the week is one way to add more variety to your family’s meals.

Examples of protein foods to look for when shopping:

- Beans and peas
- Beef
- Chicken and turkey
- Eggs
- Nuts and nut/seed butters
- Pork
- Seafood (fish and shellfish)
- Tofu and other soy products

Questions About Protein Foods

What if my family doesn't eat certain foods in the Protein Foods Group?

Your child can get enough protein as long as he or she eats a variety of foods from the Protein Foods group. Protein sources for vegetarians include eggs (for ovo-vegetarians), beans and peas, nut/seed butters, and soy products (such as tofu). If you have concerns about what your child is eating, talk with your child's doctor. He or she may want to check to see if your child is getting enough iron from protein foods and other sources.

How can I offer healthier choices?

Use these ideas for healthier ways to select and prepare meats, chicken, and turkey:

- Remove the skin from chicken or turkey before or after cooking. Remove any bones to prevent choking.
- Choose lean or low-fat cuts of meat like round or sirloin. Select ground beef that is at least 92% lean. Trim fat from meat.
- Try grilling, broiling, roasting, or baking — these cooking methods don't add extra fat. Some lean meats need slow, moist cooking to be tender — try a slow cooker.



Are some protein foods higher in sodium (salt)?

The Nutrition Facts label on food packages lists the amount of sodium in a food. Compare the amount of sodium in similar types of foods, and choose ones that are lower in sodium. If using canned beans, look for cans labeled "reduced-sodium." Fresh chicken, turkey, seafood, pork, and meat is usually lower in sodium than processed meat and poultry. Examples of processed meats and poultry are sausages, bologna, frankfurters (hot dogs), luncheon meats and loaves, pepperoni, and pre-marinated chicken. Choosing foods that are lower in sodium can help you lower your family's risk of high blood pressure and related diseases.