

# Vegetarian, Flexitarian or Just Trying to Eat Healthier?

## High-Quality Nutrition Can Help Power Your Health and Wellness

Are you one of many health-conscious eaters seeking new information to make healthier choices? This may include looking for real, fresh and natural foods or finding easy and tasty options for a variety of diets. If you are like many, giving something up isn't the focus, it's more about adopting new flavors and ways of eating that are consistent with your evolving values.

Regardless of your reason or dietary choice, it's important you include a variety of nutrient-rich foods such as low-fat and fat-free dairy, whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lean protein to support health and well-being. Many experts suggest it may be better to spread out protein-containing foods, such as dairy foods, more evenly across meals and snacks to optimize how the body uses protein.

### FAQ:

#### Why is protein important?

Protein is an essential nutrient (like fat and carbohydrate) your body needs each day. Not all proteins are equal – quality can make a difference. High-quality protein foods make it easy for you to get all of the essential amino acids your body needs to build and maintain muscles and help your body work properly. Protein also helps support healthy hair, skin and nails.

#### Is it hard to get enough protein on a vegetarian diet?

It's easier when choosing foods with high-quality protein, which provide all essential amino acids. High-quality protein sources such as dairy foods can help meet protein and other nutrient needs. The diversity, convenience and taste of dairy foods are great options to get high-quality protein on a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet. Having dairy foods with meals and snacks helps ensure protein needs are met if you follow a vegetarian diet.



In addition to being a good source of high-quality protein, **low-fat and fat-free dairy foods are an important part of healthy eating**, especially for flexitarian and vegetarian diets.

Milk and other dairy foods supply essential nutrients in our diet that are important for good health such as calcium, vitamins A and D, phosphorus, magnesium and zinc. Dairy foods also are an important source of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> – a nutrient primarily found in animal products; therefore, of particular concern for vegetarians.

– For more information on food sources of protein, see **Protein: Understanding the Basics**.

### Did You Know?

The high-quality protein found in dairy foods can be a nice complement to foods that are not sources of high-quality protein. Here are a few options that taste great and are great for you.

- Pair cereal with milk (regular or lactose-free)
- Have whole-grain crackers with cheese
- Eat yogurt with fruit or use yogurt-based dressings on vegetable or bean salads
- Add whey protein to your favorite fruit smoothie





## Fast Facts:

- Protein helps build and repair muscles.
- Dairy products, which contain all the essential amino acids, provide a good source of high-quality protein.\*
- Dairy protein, as part of a **higher-protein diet**, can help you feel fuller longer.

## Tasty tips for meals at home: Dairy can help put protein on your table.

Don't have protein on your plate? Milk with your meal is protein you can pour.\*\*

- Milk with meals can give you a protein boost – have a glass with breakfast, lunch and dinner or add milk to your favorite soups and casseroles.
- Lactose-free and flavored milk provide the same protein and essential nutrients as regular milk.
- Try mixing milk with Greek-style yogurt (½ cup of each) and frozen berries in a blender for a nutritious start to your day.

## Your body uses protein all day long. Try protein-rich yogurt, such as Greek-style yogurt, to help get your protein throughout the day.\*\*

- Yogurt is a great breakfast food. Try it mixed with fruit and/or whole-grain cereal for crunch.
- Make a smoothie for something different; plus, you can start it at home and take it with you.
- Have yogurt for your afternoon snack, as a part of a **higher-protein diet** to help curb hunger.
- Try something new at dinner – use plain Greek-style yogurt on top of your tacos or baked potato.



From **strong muscles and bones to managing weight and controlling hunger** to learning how to pick the best **options for meatless meals**, diets higher in protein can help people meet health and wellness goals. Get recipes that include protein at [wheyprotein.nationaldairycouncil.org](http://wheyprotein.nationaldairycouncil.org) and [nationaldairycouncil.org](http://nationaldairycouncil.org).

## Try cheese, a good source of protein, to help get your protein throughout the day.\*\*,†

With more than 2,000 types of cheese worldwide, there's a cheese to meet most needs and taste preferences – and who doesn't love the taste of cheese? Cheese offers protein to be enjoyed!

- Have cheese on whole-wheat toast at breakfast.
- Put lower fat cheese on a vegetable omelet – with eggs and cheese, you will have a protein-powered start to your day!
- Add cheese to a sandwich, wrap or salad at lunch.
- Cheese goes well at dinner, too. Sprinkle cheese on casseroles, soups, salads, burritos, pasta, etc.

## Power up while you're out.

### Between meals, snacks can be a great way to refuel busy bodies. Try these tips for protein on the go:

- Yogurt containers are perfectly sized to stash in your backpack, briefcase or purse as you head out the door, and you can put yogurt in the fridge for later at work or eat it once you arrive at your destination.††
- Many quick-serve restaurants and stores have low-fat or fat-free milk and flavored milk as well as yogurts and yogurt parfaits or smoothies to help fuel you and your family on the go.\*\*
- Cheese is an ideal portable snack, and it can help you add protein to your diet.†††
  - String cheese, in a variety of fun flavors, is ready to eat anytime and anywhere with fruit, nuts or crackers.\*\*

\*Look for products containing 5 grams or more of protein per serving.

\*\*Choose low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt and lower fat varieties of cheese.

†Look for cheeses providing 5 grams or more of protein per ounce.

††See label for proper refrigeration instructions for yogurt and soft cheeses.