

Protein

Protein provides the building blocks your body needs for growth, maintenance and repair. It supports the health of muscles, bone, hair, teeth, skin, and organs. Protein is also vital for making enzymes and hormones, supporting the immune system and providing energy. To stay strong and healthy at every age and stage, it's important to eat enough protein each day as part of a balanced, active lifestyle.

Food sources of protein

Protein is found in many foods. Animal-based sources include beef, lamb pork, venison, chicken, fish, seafood, eggs, and dairy products. Plant-based sources include beans, lentils, chickpeas, nuts, seeds, quinoa, tofu and tempeh.

New Zealand beef and lamb are naturally high in high-quality protein. Eating up to 500g of cooked, lean red meat per week (around 700–750g raw) as part of a varied, balanced diet can help meet your daily protein needs.

Are all proteins the same?

Not exactly. Proteins are made of smaller parts called amino acids; these are the building blocks of protein. Your body can make some of these blocks itself, but nine “essential” amino acids come from the food you eat.

- Complete proteins supply all nine essential amino acids in the right amounts. These are mostly found in animal foods such as red meat, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy, but also in soy and quinoa. These proteins are high-quality that your body can easily break down and use.
- Incomplete proteins are missing one or more essential amino acids. This makes them less easy for your body to break down and use on their own. Most plant-based proteins fit this category.

Plant proteins bring the added benefit of dietary fibre, which supports healthy digestion and helps you feel fuller for longer.

Combining a variety of plant proteins with high-quality animal proteins, such as New Zealand beef and lamb, is one of the simplest ways to get all the essential amino acids your body needs.



Who needs more protein?

Groups who may need to pay particular attention to getting enough protein include:

- Toddlers, children and teenagers: to support rapid growth and development
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women: to nourish both mother and baby
- Athletes and very active people: to repair and build muscle
- Older adults (around 70 years and over): to help maintain strength, mobility and independence

Daily protein guidelines are the minimum amount your body needs to prevent deficiency. Many people benefit from eating more, depending on the quality of the protein in their diet or their age and stage.

For people who tend to eat smaller meals, such as young children or older adults, choosing complete, high-quality proteins can be especially important.

If you think you may need more protein in your diet, seek personalised guidance from a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist.

Top protein meals and snacks

Breakfast:

- Eggs on toast
- Peanut butter and banana on wholemeal toast
- Granola with nuts, seeds, fruit and natural Greek yoghurt

Lunch:

- [Beef and bean burritos](#)
- Wrap with chicken, cheese and salad
- [Leftover lamb sandwich](#)
- Tuna rice bowl with seasonal greens

Dinner:

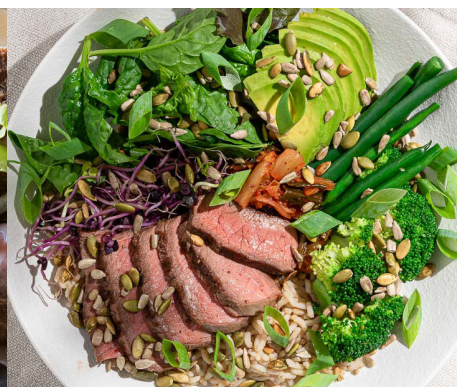
- [Beef rump steak protein power bowl](#)
- Roast chicken breast with herbed potatoes and greens
- [One pan lamb rump, lentils and greens](#)
- Honey soy tofu stir-fry with greens and sesame seeds
- [Kūmara and beef nacho bowl with avocado cream](#)

Snacks:

- Pottle of yoghurt
- A handful of almonds
- Carrot sticks and hummus
- Celery sticks with cottage cheese and raisins

For other ways to optimise your protein intake, see our [Top Tips for Protein Intake](#) resource.

If you are wanting more delicious, protein-rich recipe ideas head to [recipes.co.nz](https://www.recipes.co.nz).



Lean red meat can be described as nature's power pack; even a small serve has plenty of nutrients. It is high in protein, and an important part of a healthy balanced diet, alongside other protein foods, wholegrains, fruits, and vegetables.