Protein for Older Adults

A guide to staying strong and healthy as you age



Why food matters

Eating well supports healthy aging, but as we get older, eating may become harder than it used to be. It is common to feel more tired, less hungry, have taste changes, or forget to eat, however food remains important. Eating a variety of lean meat, eggs, dairy, grain foods, fruit and vegetables gives your body the energy it needs to stay healthy. Different foods provide fibre for healthy digestion, calcium to keep bones and teeth strong, fruits and vegetables to support immunity, and protein for muscle health.

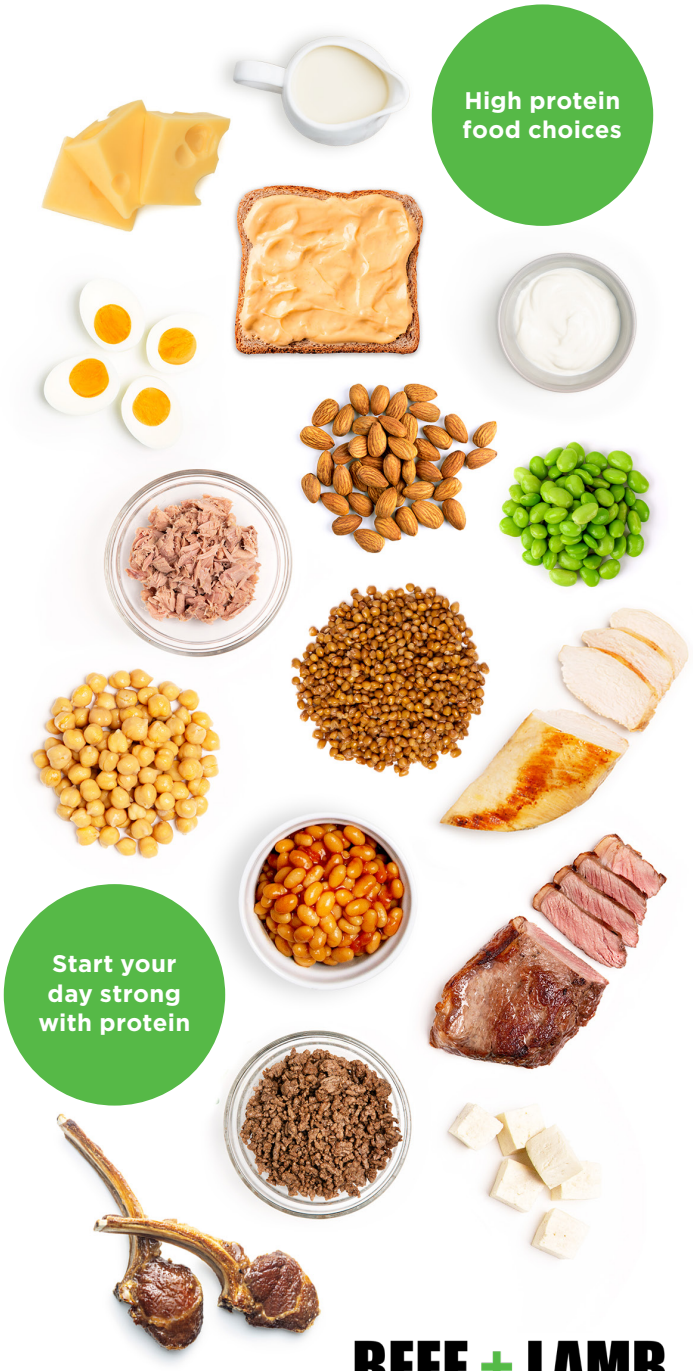
Did you know that your protein needs increase as you get older?

Protein helps keep your muscles strong, supports healing and recovery and helps you stay active and independent so you can keep doing the things you enjoy. Including a source of protein at each meal and snacking on protein-rich foods makes it easier to meet your daily protein needs.

A serve of protein can look like ½ cup slow cooked beef or lamb, 2 slices of roast beef or lamb, ½ cup cooked mince, small can of canned fish e.g tuna or salmon, ½ chicken breast, 2 eggs, ⅓ cup of nuts and seeds or 1 cup of cooked or canned beans.

Why choose lean red meat?

Lean red meat provides high quality protein, meaning it contains all the essential building blocks your body needs to maintain muscle and keep you well. Because the body absorbs it easily, you benefit from every bite, making it a nutritious choice if your appetite is reduced. It also provides key nutrients like iron, zinc and vitamin B12, which support muscle health, immunity and overall wellbeing. Lean red meat can be enjoyed in a variety of meals and textures.



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How to make mealtimes easier

- Include a source of protein at each meal. If your appetite is low, eat the protein portion first.
- Eat small, frequent meals at the times of day when you feel your best.
- Cook once, eat twice - cook larger portions and store in the fridge for future meals.
- Canned, frozen, pureed, and stewed foods can help make eating easier. Adding sauces, gravies, milk, and butter can boost your energy and protein intake while making your food easier to chew and swallow.
- Save time and effort by purchasing pre-cut or pre-portioned foods, or choosing a pre-made meal containing protein, vegetables & carbohydrates.
- Try adding mince to casseroles or pasta dishes, or choose slow cooked cuts that are tender and easy to eat, like gravy beef, beef brisket, beef chuck roast, lamb shoulder or lamb shanks.
- Sharing meals can help keep meal times enjoyable and support overall well-being.

Keep leftovers in the fridge for no more than 2 days and in the freezer for up to 3 months.

Reheat until piping hot before eating.

Need inspiration for easy-to-eat, protein-packed meals?

Give these recipes a go:

- Lamb shank broth
- Slow cooker beef and vegetable stew
- Cottage pie
- Breakfast frittata
- Mince on toast
- BLAT sandwich

A balanced diet is important for everyone. Including a source of protein at each meal or snack, alongside a variety of foods helps you stay strong and well as you age.

If you need support on ways to meet your protein goals, visit our top tips for protein intake resource. If you're still worried, seek guidance from a registered Dietitian or Nutritionist.






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

The information in this fact sheet is only general and is not to be taken as a substitute for medical advice in relation to specific symptoms or health concerns. Please discuss any concerns with your General Practitioner or a Registered Dietitian.

For a list of references please visit: beeflambnz.co.nz/health-nutrition-resources **JULY 2026**

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