

Eat healthy and stretch your budget with a variety of high-protein foods



For healthy eating and stretching food dollars, some often-overlooked protein sources can't be beat. University of Tennessee Extension professor and nutritionist Betty Greer, a registered dietician, suggests that you consider the following foods to add variety to your diet.

- Dried and canned beans and legumes of all types. Lentils are especially healthy and cook quickly. All dried beans, legumes and peas are easy to cook. Greer suggests rinsing the beans and then cooking them overnight in a slow cooker. In the morning, portion them out to suit your needs and to freeze for later meals. For seasoning ideas, search the Internet for “healthy recipes” and your bean of choice. Choose recipes that you have ingredients for or that your family will like. Canned beans, Greer adds, are good to stock in the pantry to have on hand for quick meals and for food during power failures.
- Eggs and low-fat milk. Eggs are nutritious, but limit your intake if you're on a low cholesterol diet. A single egg has about seven grams of protein. If you're milk intolerant, try soymilk and other forms of non-dairy milk. Just be sure to check the label for calcium content and vitamin D.
- High-protein sandwich breads. Find them by comparing labels.
- Cheese. Cheese is a good source of protein when used in moderation, for example melted on toast for breakfast. Greer says protein during breakfast is important for a feeling of satiety that will sustain you to lunch.
- Canned salmon, tuna and chicken. These are convenient and low in cost. Salmon, in particular, adds healthy fats to your diet. You can extend these meats by adding ingredients to make patties, salads, pasta dishes and more.
- Nuts and nut butters. They're high in fat, so dietary recommendations suggest limiting them to three to four ounces a week, but nuts are good for protein and healthy fats, along with minerals that our bodies need. Of the

nut butters, peanut butter is an economical choice. Other nut butters include almond and cashew.

- Greek yogurt. This dense yogurt can provide 15 or more grams of protein in a single serving. If you don't like it plain, Greer suggests you chop and add your own fruit.

These foods are economical, healthy and easy to prepare, says Greer, who is on the faculty of UT Extension's Family and Consumer Sciences Unit. She adds that high-protein foods are especially important to people who are dieting and for senior citizens, who are at risk of losing muscle mass as they grow older.

For more information, contact your local county UT Extension office or visit the national Extension website: <http://extension.org>

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