

PROTEIN Defined

By Karen Crawford MS, RD, CSP

Here lately, it seems that the word Protein is being commonly associated, among kids and teens, with protein bars and powders. The supplement world has become so big, that instead of chicken, beef and eggs coming to mind when asking a teen “what is a protein”, they instead give you examples of bars, powders and shakes. Protein, by definition, means 20 or more amino acids linked in a genetically controlled linear sequence into one or more long polypeptide chains- which is way more information than anyone, especially kids, needs to know. But what our kids do need to know about protein is that it is an important part of any healthy diet, contains many crucial nutrients bodies need to grow and develop and you can get plenty by eating real foods, not supplements.

When looking at MyPyramid, most of the higher protein foods fall into the Meat and Beans group. This group includes all foods made from meat, poultry, fish, dry beans or peas, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Meat and poultry are excellent sources of protein, but they contain more fat and saturated fat than other sources of protein. When eating meat and poultry, always try and choose lean or low-fat varieties and trim the fat before cooking. Fish, nuts and seeds also contain fat but from heart healthy oils. Different kinds of roasted nuts, like almonds, are great portable snacks that provide a good dose of calories and protein in a small quantity. Your protein intake should contribute approximately 15% of your total calories. For example, a 2000 calorie diet equals 75 grams of protein per day. In the chart below, you will see foods that are packed with protein along with the approximate protein content per 4 ounce serving.

Foods within the Meat and Beans Group	Amount of Protein per 4 ounce serving
Almonds (dry roasted)	24 grams
Beef Sirloin	32 grams
Chicken Breast	16 grams
Eggs (whole, scrambled)	12 grams
Ground Beef	28 grams
Ground Turkey	32 grams
Pinto Beans	12 grams
Salmon Filet	24 grams
Tuna Filet	32 grams

There are many other great sources of protein, including low fat dairy products. We even get a little protein from grains and veggies too! For healthy, normally developing kids, a diet filled with variety from all the food groups will give them the nutrients that they need to develop healthfully.