Protein is essential for maintaining muscle. Adults with more muscle mass have more independence, better balance and less risk for falls and fractures. Beginning in their 40s, adults typically lose 1 or 2 percent of their muscle mass every year. Eating the right amount of protein throughout the day can help you maintain muscle.

**Eat protein at every meal**

Eat 3 to 4 ounces (20-30 grams) of protein at each meal. Include these high-protein foods often:

- Lean meat, chicken, pork and seafood
- Beans and lentils, nuts and seeds
- Milk (if you’re lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk – it’s the same as regular, but without the lactose)
- Cheese, cottage cheese and yogurt
- Eggs

**What counts as an ounce of protein?**

**Remember that your goal is 3-4 ounces per meal.**

- 1 ounce of cooked meat, fish or chicken
  (3-4 ounces is about the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand)
- ¼ cup of cooked beans, peas or lentils
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter (picture about half of a golf ball)
- ½ ounce of nuts or seeds (12 almonds, 7 walnut halves)
- 1 cup of milk or yogurt
- 1.5 ounces of hard cheese (about the size of 3 dice)
- ¼ cup of cottage cheese

When reading food labels where protein is listed in grams, consider that 7-8 grams is about 1 ounce.

**Spread it out**

Most people eat very little protein early in the day and a lot at the end of the day. Spreading protein evenly throughout the day is important for these benefits:

- Building muscle
- Healing wounds
- Fighting infections
- Controlling blood sugar
- Sustaining energy
- Strengthening bones
- Controlling appetite

**Don’t forget exercise**

Protein and exercise together help build and repair muscle, which is crucial for staying fit for everyday activities.

Learn more about protein at [www.choosemyplate.gov/protein-foods](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/protein-foods).

This information is for general educational purposes only – always follow your doctor’s recommendations, and check with your doctor if you have any questions.