

December 2015 | [blog.myfitnesspal.com](http://blog.myfitnesspal.com) | Megan Meyer, PhD | Diet & Nutrition – Protein

## 6 Surprisingly Affordable Protein-Rich Foods

### Lean Protein on the Cheap: Maximizing your Grocery Budget AND your health

Whether you're a bodybuilding gym-goer or a weekend warrior, you've likely heard about the benefits of including lean protein in your diet. This macronutrient is important for everything from maintaining muscle mass to strengthening hair, skin and nails, and research has shown that eating more protein can be an effective weight-loss tool. High-protein foods take more work for our bodies to break down and convert into energy, meaning that you burn more calories digesting them. They also help you feel satiated earlier in a meal and keep you fuller for longer, both of which are great if you're watching your waistline and trying to keep calories in check.

The RDA (or Recommended Dietary Allowance) for protein is 0.8 g/kg/day for adults over 18 years of age, which was defined as the minimum amount needed to meet requirements for most healthy individuals. Most general recommendations state that women should consume at least 46 grams and men at least 56 grams daily, but protein requirements vary depending on body type, age and activity level, so fitness enthusiasts like yourselves may need to bump up your daily protein intake to promote optimal health.

If you want to include more protein-rich foods in your diet but are also concerned about your grocery budget, you're not alone. A recent survey by the International Food Information Council Foundation revealed that one third of participants believe high-protein foods are more expensive than other foods—a misperception that is far from the truth. In fact, it's easy to find plenty of high-protein, nutrient-rich foods to add to every meal without breaking the bank. Read on for healthy, lean sources of protein to include in your diet, no matter the size of your budget:

1. **Eggs:** There may be no more versatile, cost-effective protein source than a carton of eggs. One egg packs 6 grams of protein (if you eat the yolk) and many vitamins and minerals into only 70 calories, for an average price of less than \$0.22. It's a perfect protein, for less than a quarter per serving!

In the past, eggs received an undeserved reputation since they contain cholesterol, which was considered to be a risk factor for certain health conditions. But many studies have determined that the cholesterol content in eggs does not significantly raise blood cholesterol levels in most people. What's more, the fat in eggs comes from mono- and polyunsaturated fats, which are the heart-healthy kinds we should eat. The possibilities for incorporating eggs into the diet are endless, but here are a few recipes to get you started:

- Pesto Egg Salad
- One-Pan Mediterranean Eggs
- Stuffed Bell Pepper Eggs



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In the past, eggs received an undeserved bad reputation since they contain cholesterol, which was considered to be a risk factor for certain health conditions. Yet, many studies have determined that the cholesterol content in eggs does not significantly raise blood cholesterol levels in most people. What's more, over half of the fat in eggs comes from mono- and polyunsaturated fats, which are the heart-healthy kinds we should eat. The possibilities for incorporating eggs into the diet are endless, but here are a few recipes to get you started:

- Pesto Egg Salad
- One-Pan Mediterranean Eggs
- Stuffed Bell Pepper Eggs
- Egg and Hummus Breakfast Wrap

2. **Canned (and Pouched!) Tuna and Salmon:** Canned tuna and salmon are cheap, quick sources of both lean protein (approximately 25 grams per serving) and heart-healthy omega-3 fats, for between \$0.25 and \$0.75 per serving.



The American Heart Association recommends getting at least two 3.5-ounce servings of fish per week. To do this on the cheap, keep cans or pouches of tuna or salmon handy and use them to make sandwiches, top salads or shape into fish cakes.

- Avocado Tuna Salad
- Salad Nicoise
- Salmon Cakes with Ginger Sesame Sauce

3. **Lean Ground Beef:** Lean ground beef is one of the most budget-conscious animal proteins in the supermarket. Just 3 ounces—about the size of the palm of your hand—provides 18 grams of protein along with vitamins and minerals like iron, vitamin B12 and zinc, for about \$1.20. Choosing ground beef that is 90% lean (compared to ground round or ground chuck, which are 85% and 80% lean, respectively) ensures that you'll be trimming the fat content, while still reaping the benefits of high-quality protein. Try it in this healthy version of a taco salad:
  - Beef Taco Salad with Tomato Dressing
4. **Low-Fat or Non-Fat Dairy Products:** Dairy products, including milk, yogurt and cottage cheese, are great lean sources of protein that are also easy on the wallet. One cup of skim milk provides 8 grams (\$0.35/serving), while ½ cup of low-fat cottage cheese has 11 grams (\$0.60/serving). Plain Greek yogurt is an especially concentrated protein source, packing 18 grams into just one cup (\$1-1.50/serving). Blending yogurt with frozen fruit and milk into a smoothie or spooning yogurt into a bowl with granola and honey are quick, easy breakfast and snack options. You can also use yogurt as a replacement for other foods like mayonnaise and sour cream in recipes. For an interesting twist on low-calorie veggie dip, use Greek yogurt in a whole new way:
  - Garlic-Chive Greek Yogurt Dip
5. **Canned Beans:** Canned beans come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and flavors, and they're also one of the best sources of protein for vegetarian meals. Most beans clock in around 8 grams of protein per ½-cup serving, and they're also a great source of fiber, iron, magnesium, potassium, zinc, folate and vitamin B6. A can of most types of beans will be anywhere from \$1-2 and includes 3.5 servings, for a grand total of \$0.30-0.60/serving. Including beans in dishes like salads and soups can be as easy as getting out the can opener and tossing them with other ingredients. If you're looking for a new way to enjoy beans, try this recipe for a spicy, crunchy, high-protein snack:
  - Spicy Oven-Roasted Chickpeas
6. **Soy:** Soy products, including tofu, tempeh and dairy alternatives (think: soy milk, soy yogurt, etc.) are a great source of complete protein for those following a vegetarian or vegan diet, or for anyone looking to add variety to their protein repertoire. Cooked soybeans (also known as edamame) have 10 grams of protein in a ½-cup serving, and a cup of tofu provides about 16–20 grams for just \$0.50. And the benefits don't stop at protein; soy foods are great sources of fiber and calcium, and may reduce risk for heart disease as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Try one of the following recipes:
  - Tofu and Broccoli Stir-Fry
  - Grilled Tempeh Salad
  - Edamame Ginger Dip

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