

Lean meats and their alternatives

Lean meats are a great source of protein. Sometimes, lean meats can be expensive or difficult to find at the supermarket. The good news is that there are alternatives that are also rich sources of protein.

Fish

Fish is low in saturated fat, high in protein and is an excellent source of omega-3 fats. Eating fish, fish oils and omega-3 fats is linked to a lower risk of heart disease. Try to eat fish at least two times a week.

- The fish with the highest levels of omega-3 include: fresh or tinned salmon, some varieties of tinned tuna, blue mackerel, tinned sardines, oysters, herring, blue eye trevalla, silver perch and gemfish.
- Other good sources include: barramundi, bream, flathead, snapper, trout, rainbow trout, arrow squid, scallops and mussels.

Ways to cook and eat fish

- Tinned – enjoy salmon, tuna or sardines in spring water. Try eating tinned fish in sandwiches, in patties or in casseroles.
- Baked – Place fresh fish in a lightly greased dish with sherry, lemon juice, garlic, ginger, pepper, shallots and/or herbs and spices. Add ½ - 1 cup of liquid (milk, stock or wine), cover and cook in a moderate oven for 15-20 minutes.
- Grilled or BBQ – Grill or BBQ the fish slowly. Baste it often with marinade or lemon juice so it does not dry out or wrap it in foil.
- Casseroles/Soups/Curries - Use firm fish and add plenty of vegetables.
- Steaming – Place fish (with some ginger and spring onions on top) in a steamer. Cover and steam for about five minutes for a 2cm thick fillet.

Eggs

Eggs are high in protein and have lots of vitamins and minerals. Eggs have mostly healthy unsaturated fat and can be used instead of meat in a meal.

The National Heart Foundation recommends if you have Type 2 Diabetes or high cholesterol, to enjoy up to 7 eggs per week.

Ways to cook and eat eggs

- For a quick and easy meal try some cooked eggs on multigrain toast.
- Make scrambled eggs or an omelette and add leftover vegetables. Serve with a salad.
- Add chopped hardboiled eggs to sandwiches or salads.
- Scramble eggs and serve with baked beans, cooked tomatoes and mushrooms for a hot breakfast.
- Add some diced vegetables such as zucchini, mushrooms, tomato, spinach and onion to beaten eggs and sprinkle with grated cheese to make a vegetable frittata.

Nuts and seeds

Nuts and seeds are high in protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They have special food chemicals (antioxidants and phytochemicals) that protect your body against heart disease and some cancers. Nuts are high in fat, but it is mostly healthy fat which helps to control blood cholesterol. Nuts can be a good snack option for people not eating enough because they are high in energy and protein.

Up to a handful of nuts a day is a good amount. Include a variety of different nuts and seeds.

Ways to enjoy nuts and seeds

- Choose unsalted, raw nuts.
- Use nut and seed pastes such as peanut butter, cashew nut paste or tahini, especially if you have difficulty eating whole nuts.
- Munch on mixed nuts as a snack.
- Sprinkle almonds, cashews or sesame seeds through a stir fry.
- Add roasted pine nuts or sunflower seeds to salad.
- Add linseeds or chopped walnuts to porridge.

Legumes

Legumes include beans (kidney beans, baked beans, three bean mix), peas (chickpeas, split peas) and seeds (lentils). Legumes are low in fat and high in protein, fibre and vitamins and are cheaper than meat.

How to cook legumes

- Soak dried legumes overnight. Drain and then bring to the boil in fresh unsalted water. Simmer for 30 minutes to two hours (check the label). Split peas and lentils do not need to be soaked before cooking.
- Tinned legumes are already cooked and are ready to use. Remember to drain off all the liquid and rinse the legumes in cold water before use.

Ways to cook and eat legumes

- Add them to soup. Try split peas in ham soup or red kidney beans in a vegetable soup.
- Add a cup of kidney beans, borlotti or cannellini beans to a casserole, bolognese or shepherd's pie.
- Use a three bean mix or chickpeas in salads.
- Mash legumes with an onion and other grated or leftover vegetables to make patties. Serve with a salad and bread rolls as a main meal.
- Have baked beans on toast as a quick meal

This general advice was accurate at the time of publication (June 2020).

For more information about nutrition and your individual needs, see your GP
or an Accredited Practising Dietitian.