

GETTING ENOUGH PROTEIN IS A CHALLENGE FOR OLDER PATIENTS

Up to 1.2g protein per kg has been recommended to counteract age-related muscle loss in adults 65 years and older

Older adults have higher protein needs compared to younger adults. Yet average protein intake is inconsistent with emerging evidence on muscle health which suggests optimal health depends on maintaining muscle mass in older Australians.

Skeletal muscle mass is reduced by up to 50% in older adults, and a sedentary lifestyle and sub-optimal diet can exacerbate this age-related muscle loss.

Consuming adequate protein in combination with regular resistance exercise helps maintain muscle function, important for sustaining an active and independent lifestyle in older people.

Two to three protein-rich meals a day

The anabolic response to protein ingestion is also reduced with ageing which means a greater amount of dietary protein is required to build and maintain muscle mass in older adults.

While the total amount of protein is important, protein intake is best consumed across two to three meals a day, with each meal providing 25-30g of protein.

Spreading protein intake across the day helps maintain a positive protein balance and improve protein synthesis, optimising the benefits achieved from regular physical activity.

How can GPs help patients?

1. Protein-rich meals

Protein-rich meals for muscle health is a patient education fact sheet prepared by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) that explains the different types of foods and amounts needed to achieve 25g protein in a meal.

The simple guide below, featured in the fact sheet, avoids the need to calculate the amount of protein which is often confused with the actual weight of food.

	Choose any 1	Choose any 2	Choose any 3
Beef, lamb or pork	1 small steak, diced or other fresh meat (150g*)	Mince (75g*)	1 slice roast meat (25g**)
Fish	1 fillet (150g*)	1 small can of fish (95g)	1 slice smoked salmon
Chicken	1/2 breast (150g*)	Thigh (75g*)	1 slice roast meat (25g**)
Eggs		2	1
Dairy foods		2 slices cheese (40g) 1/2 cup ricotta cheese (120g) 1 glass milk (250ml)	Feta cheese (40g) 1/4 cup cottage cheese (60g) 1/2 cup yoghurt (100g)
Legumes	200g firm tofu	1 cup cooked (175g) lentils, chickpeas	1/2 cup hummus 1/2 cup cooked (90g) 3 bean mix
Nuts and seeds		1/2 cup nuts and seeds (60g)	1 tb nut or seed paste

For example, 150g of meat (raw weight) provides around 25g of protein. For meals prepared with a smaller portion of meat or protein alternatives, select two foods from column two or three foods from column three, to provide 25g of protein.

Three ways to achieve protein-rich meals that provide 25g protein



40g cheese + 2 eggs
= 1 portion



25g** roast meat, 1/2 cup hummus + 100g yoghurt
= 1 portion



150g* fish fillet
= 1 portion

2. Nutrient-rich protein foods

To achieve a nutritionally adequate diet, older adults need to eat a variety of foods in amounts recommended in the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. As appetite decreases with ageing, it is important for older Australians to eat nutrient-rich foods to 'make every bite count'.

Many protein-rich foods are also important sources of other essential nutrients:



Red meat, such as lean beef and lamb, three to four times a week provides **iron and zinc**, important for immune function



Three serves of dairy foods a day provides **calcium**, important for bone health



Legumes, such as lentils, beans or hummus, provide **fibre and prebiotics**, important for gut health



Fish twice a week provides **omega-3**, important for heart health

3. Easy meal ideas

Meals that are easier to chew and swallow are suggested for older adults. Examples include soups, casseroles and meals made with minced meat (i.e. bolognese sauce, chilli con carne and meat balls). These convenient options can also be frozen and thawed for easy and readily available meals.

HOW TO ORDER FREE RESOURCES

Meat & Livestock Australia's nutrition resources provide practical tips for planning and serving healthy, balanced meals. These patient-friendly resources include portion guidance for meeting protein, carbohydrate and iron needs for different dietary requirements and life stages.

WHO IS MLA?

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is an industry owned Rural Research and Development Corporation that delivers marketing, research and development services to Australia's red meat and livestock industry. Our activities in nutrition research and communications aim to support the consumption of Australian red meat in healthy, balanced meals.

