

## Protein Pointers Discussion Guide

For background information on malnutrition, please refer to the [Eating for Your Best Health Discussion Guide](#). You may choose to introduce the basics of malnutrition before using this discussion guide.

### Materials Needed:

- Protein Pointers Fact Sheet

Refer to “Protein Pointers” [Fact Sheet](#)

### Introduction:

Protein is a very important nutrient to focus on in our diets. Getting enough protein helps us maintain muscle. Adults with more muscle mass have more independence, better balance, and less risk for falls and fractures. Beginning at around age 40, 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.

**DO:** Hand out *Protein Pointers* fact sheet.

**SAY:** Protein should be included at every meal. A good per meal serving of protein is 20-30 grams or 3-4 ounces

**ASK:** Do you know what foods are high in protein? Discuss at your tables.

**SAY:** These foods are all great sources of protein:

- Fish, chicken, turkey, pork, beef
- Eggs
- Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, cheese
- Dairy milk. If lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk (it has the same nutrition)
  - Alternative beverages made from rice, soy, hemp or other plants do not always have the same protein. Read labels. Milk has 8 grams/1 cup.
- Tofu, tempeh
- Beans (black, kidney, pinto, refried, garbanzo), lentils
- Lightly salted nuts, seeds, and nut butter (such as peanut butter)

**SAY:** As I mentioned, you want to aim for 3-4 ounces of protein foods at every meal.

**ASK:** Can anyone tell me what 3-4 ounces of any of these foods is?

**SAY:** That’s a tough one. Here are some helpful pointers to help guide you with protein portions.

- 3-4 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish is about the size of a deck of cards when cooked
- 1 egg = 1 ounce

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- 1 cup of milk or yogurt = 1 ounce
- ¼ cup of cottage cheese = 1 ounce
- 1 slice or 3 dice-sized cubes of hard cheese = 1-1½ ounces
- ¼ cup cooked beans or peas – 1 ounce
- 1 tablespoon of nut butter = 1 ounce
- 12 almonds or 7 walnut halves = ½ ounce

Get your 3-4 ounces from one food or from a variety of these foods!

**ASK:** Can you give an example of 3-4 ounces of protein foods that you might eat at one meal? Remember, you don't have to get all the ounces from only one food.

Discuss at your tables first and then I'll ask for volunteers to share!

**SAY:** Another way to make sure you're getting enough protein at a meal is to look at protein in grams. When reading food labels where protein is listed in grams, consider that **7-8 grams is about 1 ounce**. If it's easier for you, you can remember that you want to aim for 20-30 grams of protein per meal (which is about equal to 3-4 ounces).

**Spread It Out:**

**SAY:** 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
  - Very helpful if you have pre-diabetes or diabetes
- Sustaining energy
- Strengthening bones
- Controlling appetite

**SAY:** Here are some high protein snack ideas to get your protein at all times of the day!

- Snack ideas:
  - Cheese and crackers
  - Peanut butter and jelly toast (or English muffin)
  - Banana and peanut butter
  - Black or refried beans with salsa and tortilla chips
  - Eggs with cheese and/or avocado on toast
  - Cottage cheese with canned peaches
  - A handful of mixed nuts
  - Hard-boiled eggs
  - Turkey/roast beef and cheese sandwich

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- Hummus and vegetables or crackers
- Homemade shake and smoothie ideas (add dry milk powder or protein powder):
  - Vanilla ice cream or yogurt with peanut butter and frozen fruit
  - Vanilla ice cream or yogurt with orange juice and banana
  - Chocolate ice cream with frozen berries and nuts/nut butter
  - Strawberry yogurt with banana and peanut butter

**ASK:** What are some of your favorite high protein meals and snacks?

**Don't Forget Exercise:**

**SAY:** Don't forget to include physical activity in your day. Protein and exercise together help build and repair muscle, which is crucial for staying fit for everyday activities. Find classes taught just for older adults that you can enjoy.

**ASK:** What are some of your favorite ways to stay active?

**SAY:** Those are all great options. Here are some others. (Say only the ones not already mentioned.)

- Walking
- Chores
- Light gardening / yard work
- Swimming
- Yoga/pilates
- Biking
- Aerobics classes
- Weight training classes

**SAY:** Remember these key points about protein:

- Try to eat protein at every meal, 3-4 ounces or 20-30 grams
- Spread protein intake out throughout the day
- Stay active each day

Thank you for coming!