



Making the Most of Meat and Alternatives

Meat and Alternatives are 1 of 4 important food groups in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Together with Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, and Milk and Alternatives they form a tried and true blueprint for healthy eating.

Meat and Alternatives are tasty and versatile.

Whether it's a juicy burger, tender chicken breast, poached fish fillet, tofu burger, fluffy scrambled eggs or spiced kidney beans, Meat and Alternatives offer up terrific variety and taste as a key part of healthy eating.

Meat and Alternatives provide a variety of essential nutrients including protein, iron, B vitamins and zinc.

- **Protein** is a part of every cell in our bodies. Without enough of this essential building block, your body could not maintain or repair itself.
- **Iron** is important because it carries oxygen to all your body parts, helps prevent infections and helps your body make energy. It also helps to prevent anemia that can make you feel tired.
- **B Vitamins** (e.g. thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, folacin, and vitamins B6 and B12) help your body to make red blood cells and to use the energy (calories) found in the foods we eat
- **Zinc** is needed for proper growth and helps your body fight infections.

Avoid portion distortion – you can get too much of a good thing.

Canada's Food Guide recommends servings of Meat and Alternatives every day. The recommended amount varies with age and gender.

Age	# of Food Guide Servings of Meat and Alternatives
Toddlers 2-3 years	1
Children 4-8 years	1
Youth 9-13 years	1-2
Teens (female) 14-18 years	2
Teens (male) 14-18 years	3
Adults (females) 19 years and older	2
Adults (males) 19 years and older	3

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One Food Guide Serving of meat equals 75 g (2 ½ ounces) cooked. This is approximately:

- 1/2 of a chicken breast or a chicken leg with thigh (without skin)
- 125 mL (1/2 cup) of flaked fish or ground meat
- 3 slices (75 g) of packaged luncheon meat (check the package label for the number of grams per serving)

As for alternatives, a 175 mL (3/4 cup) serving of cooked beans, peas or lentils, or soybean curd (tofu) counts as one Food Guide Serving. A Food Guide Serving equals 30 mL (2 tbsp) of peanut butter, 60 mL (1/4 cup) shelled nuts and seeds, or two eggs..

Tips for choosing and enjoying Meat and Alternatives

Select lean cuts of meat to avoid excess fat.

For beef, choose well-trimmed inside, outside or eye of round or sirloin cuts and lean or extra lean ground beef. For pork, choose lean ham, pork tenderloin or loin chops. For lamb, choose cuts from the leg and loin.

Enjoy poultry without the skin.

Reduce saturated fat. Choose items like skinless chicken or turkey breasts or thighs, or remove the skin from poultry at home before cooking.

“Let’s go fishing”.

Fish and shellfish are tasty meat alternatives. Some fish, such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, a type of fat that, together with a balanced eating plan, may help prevent some forms of heart disease.

Beans, beans and more beans!

Meat Alternatives such as beans (kidney, soy, black), peas, and lentils are lower in fat and still provide protein, iron and B vitamins. Legumes are a great source of fibre. Enjoy soups, stews, casseroles and salads with legumes or use pureed beans or chick peas in dips and spreads.

Experiment with Soy!

Soybeans are unique among beans because they contain all the building blocks or amino acids found in other complete protein foods like meat. Experiment! Use tofu in place of half the ground beef in meatloaf, chili or tacos. Or snack on a handful of soy nuts rather than chips or crackers. The best nutritional choice is tofu made with calcium.

Explore the Alternatives!

In moderation, eggs can be part of healthy eating. They’re an inexpensive source of high quality protein and make for fast and easy meals.

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Go Nuts!

Nuts and seeds are higher fat foods. However, the mono and polyunsaturated fats they provide has been linked to health benefits. Enjoy nuts, nut butters and seeds in small amounts in meals and snacks. Keep it safe – when choosing, storing and cooking meat and poultry.

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- ✓ Keep all meats and poultry cold – make it the last selection in your grocery cart and refrigerate quickly.
- ✓ Defrost in the refrigerator, not on countertops.
- ✓ Cook meat and poultry thoroughly. You can safely eat whole pieces of beef or lamb medium rare, which means the centre can show a hint of pink. Always cook ground beef well so no pink remains. A meat thermometer is the best way to tell when meat is cooked to the right temperature.

Will eating more protein-rich foods help build my muscles?

It's a myth that protein alone builds muscle mass. Adequate protein, along with enough calories and balanced eating, all contribute to the development of healthy muscles. Overdoing the protein adds extra calories and is not necessary. For muscle building make sure that your workout contains a strength training component.

True or False: Whey protein and amino acid supplements will help produce bigger muscles.

Answer: False – These products can be expensive, offer no advantage over food choices providing adequate calories and protein, and excess amounts can be harmful.

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This information is not intended to replace advice from your family doctor or dietitian.
Find a dietitian in your area at www.dietitians.ca/find or call 1-888-901-7776.

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