

ADDRESSING MALNUTRITION: HOW PRIORITIZING PROTEIN-DENSE FOODS LIKE PORK CAN HELP

According to the Canadian Malnutrition Task Force, one in three seniors (65-plus years) living in the community is at nutrition risk.¹ As many as two in three seniors living in long-term care have malnutrition, and, nine out of ten don't get enough protein.² Malnutrition is a slippery slope leading to frailty, impaired immunity, declining health, loss of independence, and decreased quality of life.

Consequences of Malnutrition

- Weight, muscle, and bone loss
- Impaired immunity and health
- Fatigue, frailty, falls, and fractures
- Loss of mobility and independence
- Hospitalization and long-term care

Good Nutrition Supports Healthy Aging

Older adults need to eat a nutritious diet with enough protein, energy, and nutrients to support healthy aging. Encouraging seniors to choose protein-rich foods — lean meats such as pork, chicken, and fish — that have a good amount of protein per serving can help them get more of the protein and nutrients they need.

DID YOU NOW? One in four older adults (65-plus years) is living with frailty in Canada, according to the Canadian Frailty Network.³ Loss of muscle mass and strength can lead to frailty and sarcopenia.

Protein is Vital for Healthy Aging

To age well, older adults need to eat enough protein to help preserve their muscle and bone health. Osteoporosis Canada notes that older adults who don't eat enough protein are at high risk for bone loss and fractures.⁴ Prioritizing protein-rich foods is important to help build, repair, and maintain strong muscles and bones.

Protein shortfalls: Inadequate dietary protein intake relative to needs leads to loss of lean body mass.⁵ Muscle and bone loss puts seniors at higher risk of sarcopenia and osteoporosis.

Protein recommendations: Higher dietary protein intakes are needed for older adults who are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition due to acute or chronic illness.^{5,6} To help older adults maintain and regain lean body mass and function, an older adult's diet should provide at least:

**1.0-1.2 g
Protein/kg**
body weight/day
For healthy
older adults

**1.2-1.5 g
Protein/kg**
body weight/day
for most older adults
with severe injury
or illness*

**Even More
Protein**
For older adults with
severe injury
or illness

*Older adults with severe kidney disease who are not on dialysis may need to limit their protein intake.

More than the RDA: The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of 0.8 grams of good-quality protein per kilogram of body weight per day is intended as a minimum to avoid deficiency in healthy adults (19-plus years).⁷

Research Shows Seniors Need More Protein Per Meal

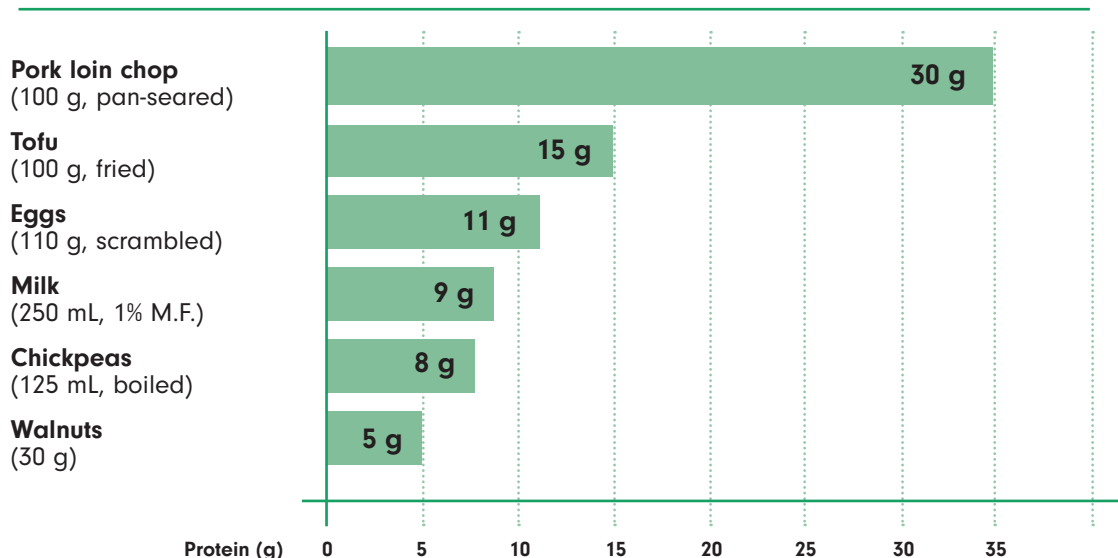
While between 20 grams and 30 grams of high-quality protein per meal can stimulate muscle protein synthesis maximally in healthy young adults, research suggests older adults may need up to twice as much.^{8,9} The Canadian NuAge Study conducted in generally healthy older adults living in the community found higher amounts of protein per meal are needed to preserve muscle strength and physical function.⁹



Prioritizing high-quality, nutrient-dense protein foods: This is especially important for seniors with small appetites. A pork loin chop contains 30 grams of protein per 100-gram serving, plus iron, zinc, and multiple B vitamins.¹⁰

Meat is protein-rich: Evidence shows lean red meat improves muscle health in older adults.¹¹

Protein Per Serving of Some Common Foods



Source: Health Canada. 2015. Canadian Nutrient File. Food Codes: 1882, 6577, 133, 63, 3390, 2590. Serving sizes based on Health Canada's Table of Reference Amounts for Food. Note: Nutrient values are rounded per Canadian nutrition labelling rules.

The Canadian Malnutrition Task Force's Recommendation: This task force recommends a variety of protein foods, including meat (such as pork), poultry, fish, milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, soy, legumes, and nuts at meals and for snacks.¹²

- Research shows that protein-per-meal amounts to maintain muscle and physical function increase with age.^{8,9}
- Prioritizing protein-rich, nutrient-dense foods, including lean meat such as pork, chicken, or fish, can help seniors meet their nutrient needs. Pork is an affordable meat choice for those trying to eat well on a budget.¹⁴
- Breakfast is often low in protein, so adding lean protein at breakfast is a practical strategy for older adults.¹⁵

Promoting Longevity

A 2022 worldwide analysis that included more than 170 countries and territories found that eating meat, including red meat, poultry, game, and organ meat, was associated with longer life expectancy. Meat intake and longevity correlated to nutrient contributions beyond energy.¹³

Key Considerations For your Practice:

Malnutrition is a major concern for seniors in Canada. Referral to a registered dietitian is recommended to help support patients at nutrition risk.¹ Attention to protein nutrition is needed:

- 1.0 to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day is recommended for healthy older adults to maintain lean body mass and function.
- Higher dietary protein intakes are required for older adults who are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition due to acute or chronic illness.^{5,6}

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