

Adding Calories and Protein to Your Diet

Getting enough calories and protein is important for your health. It can help you:

- fight infection
- have more energy
- heal and recover
- maintain muscle strength
- avoid muscle loss

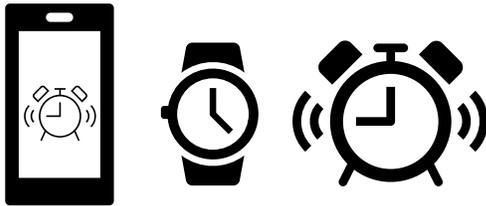
There are many illnesses, conditions, or treatments that can:

- lower your appetite
- increase how much nutrition you need
- make you feel tired more easily

Even a small amount of calories and protein can help you feel better and stronger.

When to eat

- Try to eat at least every 2–3 hours, even when you don't feel hungry.
 - Set an alarm on your smartphone, watch, or clock to remind you to eat.
 - You may find it easier to think of eating as medication. Eat at the same time each day as you would take medication.



- Try to eat more when your appetite is best.
- Drink between meals or at the end of your meal. This will leave more room in your stomach for food.

Plan ahead

- When you can, make extra food and freeze it in single portions. Use this extra food on low energy days when you don't feel like making food.
- Carry shelf stable snacks (don't need to be kept cold) with you wherever you go.
- Keep snacks in your bag, vehicle, office, and in different rooms in your house. This will make them easy for you to access and enjoy. Try:
 - Energy bites
 - Protein bars
 - Fruit and nut bars
 - Trail mix
 - Granola bars
 - Peanut butter or cheese-filled crackers
 - Jerky
 - Nutrition supplement drinks or bars
- Stock your pantry with ready-to-eat or easy-to-make foods.

Save your energy

You may have some days when you don't feel like making food.

To help prepare for low energy days:

- Use pre-washed, pre-cut vegetables and fruits.
- Try frozen store-bought meals.
- Make large batches of food. Keep some in the fridge for eating within the next day. Freeze the extra in small portions.
 - Thaw overnight in the fridge, or in the microwave when you're ready for it.
- Freeze leftover smoothies in reusable ice pop molds for a quick refreshing snack.
- Make energy bites and keep them in the freezer. They thaw quickly.
- Grocery shopping and delivery services, meal services (such as Meals on Wheels™), and meal prep boxes may be available in your community.
- Ask friends and family to help make meals.

Higher calorie and protein food list

Use the following lists and tips to add extra calories and protein to foods you enjoy. Try to eat higher calorie and protein foods at each meal and snack.

Protein foods

Milk and dairy alternatives

Cheese

- Cottage or ricotta cheese 2% M.F. or higher
- Cream cheese, full fat
- Hard cheese, full fat, such as cheddar, Colby, and Swiss
- Paneer
- Soft cheese, full fat, such as brie, fontina, mozzarella, and queso fresco
- Sour cream, 14% M.F.
- Soy cheese

Liquid milk and creams

- Ayran
- Cream, all types
- Drinks made from milk 2% or higher
- Fortified plant-based beverage, like soy (8 g protein or more per cup)
- Kefir
- Lassi
- Milk, buttermilk, evaporated milk: 3.25% (homogenized)
- Milk, flavoured 2% milk (chocolate, strawberry, vanilla)
- Ultrafiltered/ microfiltered milks higher than 2% such as Fairlife[®], Joyya[®], and Natrel Plus[®]

Other milk products

- Balkan, Greek, or Icelandic-style yogurt, higher than 2% M.F.
- Custard, pudding
- Ice cream, frozen yogurt (full fat versions)
- Milk powder (skim and whole)
- Plant-based yogurt such as soy (4 g protein or more per serving)
- Yogurt, higher than 2% M.F.

Animal-based

- Eggs
 - Whole eggs or liquid whole eggs
 - Egg substitutes such as Eggbeaters[®]
 - Egg whites
 - Store-bought eggnog
- Fish, all types, canned, fresh, or frozen
- Jerky
- Meat, such as beef, bison, buffalo, elk, lamb, moose, pork, rabbit, and venison
- Meats, cured (bacon, prosciutto, salami)
- Poultry, such as chicken, duck, partridge, and turkey
- Seafood and shellfish, such as clams, crab, lobster, mussels, and shrimp
- Wieners, sausages, and deli meats

Plant-based

- All dried, canned, or fresh legumes and pulses (beans, peas, lentils)
- Edamame (green soybeans)
- Hummus
- Nut butters, such as almond, peanut, and cashew
- Nutritional yeast
- Nuts, such as almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, macadamia, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, and walnuts
- Pea butter
- Seeds (chia, flax, hemp hearts, pumpkin, sunflower, sesame)
- Seed butters (pumpkin, tahini)
- Seitan
- Tofu, tempeh, meat substitutes

M.F. = milk fat

Condiments, fats, and oils

- Avocado
- Butter, ghee, and margarine (regular, non-hydrogenated)
- Coconut, coconut milk (regular fat)
- Creamy sauces and gravy, full fat mayonnaise and salad dressings (regular)
- Oils (canola, flax, olive, peanut)
- Whipped dessert topping

Desserts, sweets, and sugars

- Cakes, cupcakes, cookies, pastries, pies
- Chocolate, chocolate covered raisins and nuts
- Honey
- Jam, jelly
- Syrup: agave, maple

Other foods

- Dried fruit: apricot, cranberries, dates, figs, raisins
- Granola, muesli, or trail mix
- Granola bars
- Higher protein cereals, such as Special K[®] Protein, Quaker[®] Fibre & Protein instant oatmeal, Kashi GO[®], and Vector[®]
- Protein bars
- Wheat germ, oat bran
- Whole grains: amaranth, kamut, millet, quinoa, teff

Nutrition supplements

A nutrition supplement helps when you can't meet your nutrient needs through food alone.

Choose high-calorie and high-protein versions.



Check out ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts.
Search for information on nutrition supplements and protein powders.

High calorie and protein recipes

For high calorie and high protein recipes, check out:

- ahs.ca/MoreProteinRecipes
- [Myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)
 - Search: [High-calorie and high-protein recipes](#)



Tips to add more calories and protein at meals and snacks

See the tips below for how to include food and drinks from the “Higher calorie and protein food list”.

Protein foods

Milk and dairy alternatives

- Choose full-fat options when possible. This gives you more calories than the lower-fat versions.
- Use whole milk or skim milk powder in recipes. Try it in cream soups, mashed potatoes, gravy, yogurt, smoothies, and cheese sauce.
- Add grated brick cheese, cottage, or ricotta cheese to cooked pasta, vegetables, or mashed potatoes,
- Try cottage cheese in smoothies.
- Top fruit, waffles, and desserts with Greek or Icelandic-style yogurt.
- Choose drinks with calories or protein. Try milk, fortified soy beverage, smoothies, or nutrition supplements drinks.
- Snack on slices or cubes of cheese.
- Cook hot cereal, like oatmeal, with 3.25% milk and add cream on top before eating.



Meat and plant-based foods

- Use hummus and bean dips for sandwich fillings, cracker spreads, or vegetable dips.
- Choose sweet tofu as dessert.
- Snack on trail mix (nuts, seeds, and dried fruits like apricots, cranberries, or raisins).
- Add nuts or seeds to salads, stir-fry, cereal, muffins, cookies, and loaves.
- Add nut or seed butter to hot cereals or to smoothies or use as a dip.
- Add scrambled eggs to fried rice or drop eggs into soups.

Condiments, fats, and oils

- Add extra fat when making soups, hot cereal, mashed potatoes, pasta, or rice.
- Add oil to smoothies and butter or margarine to cooked vegetables.
- Add slices of avocado to sandwiches and salads.
- Mash avocado to make a vegetable or cracker dip.
- Use coconut milk in soups and smoothies.
- Add blended white beans and olive oil into hummus.



Desserts, sweets, and sugars

- Enjoy high-calorie desserts like cakes, cookies, pies, and pastries once in a while.
- Use jelly or syrup for a glaze on meat or vegetables.
- Have chocolate-covered raisins or peanuts with snacks.
- Soft drinks, candy, and alcohol have calories but few nutrients. Eat or drink these only once in a while.

Other foods

- Sprinkle wheat germ, dried fruit, or granola on yogurt, cottage cheese, or ice cream.
- Add dried fruit or oat bran to baked goods and hot cereal.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](https://ahs.ca/811) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (ab.211.ca/) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.