

February SMART Start: Make Half Your Protein LEAN!

How much is needed?

Most people need 5-6 ounces per day, but protein needs vary according to age, sex, and level of physical activity. In general, 1 ounce of meat, poultry or fish, ¼ cup cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds can be considered as 1 ounce equivalent from the meat and beans group. **To earn a SMART Start “Half Protein Lean” point, make 3-4 ounces of YOUR daily protein LEAN! (Read on)**

Why Protein?

In order for your body to build and maintain itself, protein is a key nutrient. Making SMART protein choices will help you build muscle; keep hair, skin and fingernails healthy; form blood cells; and make antibodies to protect us from illness and infections. Most Americans eat enough food from this group, but need to make leaner and more varied selections of these foods. Ideally, protein sources in your diet should include from both animal (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy) and vegetable (beans, soy, and nuts).

Make it LEAN!

The key is making sure you get your animal protein without too much saturated fat. Here are some tips to help you make SMART protein choices.

- **Start with a lean choice. For beef and pork choose products with round or loin in the name (top round, sirloin, tenderloin, etc).** Choose extra lean ground beef. The label should say at least "90% lean". You may be able to find ground beef that is 93% or 95% lean. For poultry, skinless boneless chicken or turkey is your best bet. Fish is an excellent source of lean protein.
- **Cook it lean.** Trim away all of the visible fat from meats and poultry before cooking. Broil, grill, roast, poach, or boil meat, poultry, or fish instead of frying. Drain off any fat that appears during cooking. Skip or limit the breading on meat, poultry, or fish. Breading adds fat and calories. It will also cause the food to soak up more fat during frying. Prepare dry beans and peas without added fats. Choose and prepare foods without high fat sauces or gravies.
- **Vary your protein choices.** Choose fish more often for lunch or dinner. Look for fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, trout, and herring. Choose dry beans or peas as a main dish or part of a meal often. Have nuts as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes.

For more information about protein and how much is needed, see the website, www.mypyramid.gov or email Jennifer, your Wellness Team Dietitian at jennifer.patzkowsky@polk-fl.net or call 648-3057.