



4 Meatless Meals That Pack a Protein Punch

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In the old-fashioned American diet, meat was the star of almost every meal. Now, health experts advise us to consume fewer animal foods and more plant foods.

“By substituting plant-based proteins for meat, you can decrease unhealthy saturated fat and increase healthful fiber, vitamins and minerals in your meal plan,” says Georgia Giannopoulos, RD, CDN, CNSC, a clinical dietitian at Weill Cornell Medical Center. “Some plant-based proteins, such as nuts, are also packed with healthful unsaturated fats for added benefit. And plant foods are rich in phytochemicals, substances that help protect against chronic diseases.”

Delete the meat, keep the protein. If you're used to building your meals around a piece of beef, pork or poultry, switching to meatless meals can be a challenge, but there are plenty of options that will provide adequate protein and leave you feeling satiated.

Legumes, nuts, and seeds are plant foods rich in protein. The legume family includes an extensive variety of what are commonly



referred to as “dried beans and peas.” These include kidney, navy, pinto, black, cannellini and other types of beans, and black-eyed peas, split peas, and chickpeas. About the only beans and peas that aren't high in protein are green and yellow string or snap beans and green peas. Lentils are another member of the legume family.

Soybeans and soy products, including tofu and soymilk, also can contribute significant amounts of protein. “Tofu is easy to add to salads, stir fries, and soups for a burst of protein. If you are lactose-

intolerant, substitute soymilk (or lactose-free cow's milk) for a protein-rich alternative,” recommends Giannopoulos.

You may be surprised at another food group that serves as a protein source: whole grains. Most types of whole grains contain anywhere from one to four grams of protein per serving, and are a good source of complex carbohydrates.

“Quinoa, which has been dubbed a ‘supergrain,’ contains four grams of protein per half-cup serving. Mix quinoa with vegetables, beans, and/or nuts to make a nutritious dish,” advises Giannopoulos. Quinoa is also a good option for people with celiac disease because it's gluten-free. Other grains that contain protein include barley, oats, bulgur wheat, wheat berries, amaranth, millet, and brown and wild rice.

“Another advantage of plant proteins is that many are non-perishable, so you can stock up on these ingredients when they are on sale, which will save you time and money,” notes Giannopoulos.

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An added bonus is that many plant proteins are a fraction of the cost of animal proteins.

Not necessarily vegetarian. The purpose of adding meatless meals to your dietary plan is to remove some of those burgers, steaks and pork chops from your diet, not to steer clear of animal foods altogether.

“Dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese are great sources of protein; stick with the recommended portion size or choose low-fat varieties to keep your saturated fat and caloric intake in check,” says Giannopoulos. “Eggs are another excellent option; in fact, they are a ‘perfect protein,’ because of their high biological value.”

Try one or more of these meatless meals provided by Giannopoulos: They’re high in protein and other nutrients, but slim in saturated fat and cholesterol. 🌱

Yogurt with nuts and berries



1 cup yogurt, Greek, nonfat
 ¼ cup walnuts
 1 Tbs honey
 10 blueberries
 3 strawberries, sliced

TIP: Buy a large container of yogurt and portion it out yourself at home. Choose fruits that are in season; they are often less expensive.

Calories	400
Protein (g)	25
Fat (g)	19
Saturated fat (g)	2
Carbohydrates	36
Sodium (mg)	87
Fiber (g)	3

Pita pizza



1 whole-wheat pita bread, 6 ½" diameter
 ¼ cup tomato sauce
 ¼ cup ricotta cheese, part skim
 ¼ cup mozzarella cheese, part skim
 Fresh basil and/or

oregano to taste

Calories	360
Protein (g)	23
Fat (g)	12
Saturated fat (g)	7
Carbohydrates (g)	43
Sodium (mg)	590
Fiber (g)	6

TIP: Substitute 1½ tsp extra virgin olive oil for tomato sauce to make a “white” pizza.

Spinach salad



1½ cups baby spinach
 ½ cup chickpeas
 ¼ cup almonds
 2 oz extra-firm tofu
 ¼ cup tomatoes
 ¼ cup cucumbers
 1 tsp extra virgin olive oil
 1 Tbs balsamic vinegar

TIP: Use unsalted almonds; rinse and drain chickpeas; drain tofu and pat dry before cutting into cubes.

Calories	467
Protein (g)	21
Fat (g)	27
Saturated fat (g)	2
Carbohydrates (g)	41
Sodium (mg)	95
Fiber (g)	12

Quinoa and beans



1 cup quinoa, cooked
 ¾ cup black beans, canned, rinsed and drained
 ¼ cup red peppers, chopped
 2 Tbs scallions, chopped
 2 tsp olive oil
 2 tsp lime juice
 2 Tbs cilantro, chopped

TIP: Choose beans that have no added salt; add cumin or chili powder to punch up the flavor.

Calories	475
Protein (g)	19
Fat (g)	13
Saturated fat (g)	1
Carbohydrates (g)	70
Sodium (mg)	30
Fiber (g)	15