

# Eating Well with Cirrhosis

People with cirrhosis need more protein and calories than the average person. If your liver is not working well, you may become tired and weak. Eating enough protein and calories is important if you have cirrhosis because:

- your liver may be working harder than usual
- you may not be able to store as many nutrients as usual

This handout can help you get the nutrition (protein, calories, vitamins, and minerals) you need to stay strong and be able to do the things you need to do every day. It will also help you cut down on the salt (sodium) you eat.

## When and what should I eat?

- Eat foods higher in protein and lower in sodium.
- Eat protein-rich foods at every meal and snack.
- Have a bedtime snack that has protein and carbohydrates.
- If you wake in the night, have a snack.
- Avoid alcohol.

## Eat more foods with protein

Everyone needs a different amount of protein. Talk to your healthcare provider about how much is right for you.

**Start by eating 3 meals and 2–3 snacks each day.**  
**Have a bedtime snack every day.**

Use the *Protein in foods* table on the right.

### Aim for at least:

- 2–3 servings of protein at each meal and
- 1–2 servings of protein at each snack.

## Protein in foods

Each serving has about 7 grams of protein

Food	1 serving
<b>Milk products</b>	
Milk, kefir, chocolate milk	1 cup (250 mL)
Regular yogurt	¾ cup (175 mL)
Greek yogurt	¼ cup (60 mL)
Cheese*	1 oz (30 g)
Ricotta or cottage cheese *	¼ cup (60 mL)
<b>Plant-based protein foods</b>	
Hemp seed hearts	2 Tbsp (30 mL)
Nuts and seeds, unsalted	¼ cup (60 mL)
Nut and seed butters, unsalted	2 Tbsp (30 mL)
Meatless protein, vegetarian ground round	2 Tbsp (30 mL)
Peas, beans, lentils, soft tofu	½ cup (125 mL)
Hummus, soybeans (edamame)	⅓ cup (75 mL)
Tempeh	¼ cup (60 mL)
Firm tofu	⅓ cup (3.5 oz/100 g)
Soy beverage**	1 cup (250 mL)
Bread, whole grain	1 slice
<b>Animal protein foods</b>	
Fish, chicken, turkey, pork, beef, game meats (cooked)	1 oz (30 g)
Eggs	1
Egg whites	2 whites, ¼ cup (60 mL)
<b>Nutrition supplements</b>	
Nutrition supplement drinks, bars, puddings	Protein amounts vary. Read Nutrition Facts tables on packages.
Protein powders	
Protein bars, shakes	

\* Cheese can be higher in salt. Choose those that are unsalted or lower in sodium.

\*\*Some plant-based beverages (almond, coconut, cashew, rice, and oat) are low in protein, so they are not listed here.

### 1 protein serving is:

1 oz. (30 g) of cheese, meat, meat alternatives, and tofu  
= 2 Tbsp (30 mL)  
= the size of a golf ball



## Ideas for meals and snacks

- whole grain cereal with 1 cup (250 mL) of milk
- a smoothie: banana, yogurt, and protein powder
- toast with 2 Tbsp (30 mL) peanut butter
- a bran muffin with cheese
- fruit and a container of Greek yogurt
- a nutrition supplement drink

## Ideas for adding protein to meals

- Add protein powder to hot cereal, pudding, and homemade muffins.
- Add beans or lentils to soups, stews, and sauces.
- Melt low salt cheese in soups, sauces, scrambled eggs, and casseroles.
- Add unsalted nuts, seeds, and wheat germ to cereals, salads, smoothies, or yogurt.

Talk to your healthcare team about other ways to increase the protein in your diet.

## Eat less sodium (salt)

Too much sodium can make your body hold on to extra fluid. This fluid can pool in your belly and legs. Swelling in your belly (ascites) can make you feel fuller, quicker. Eating foods with less sodium can help control ascites.

### Aim to eat less than 2000 mg of sodium a day.

One teaspoon of salt has about 2300 mg of sodium.

All types of salt contain the same amount of sodium, including table salt, sea salt, and Himalayan salt.

### Tips to reduce sodium:

At first, foods may taste bland. Over time, your taste buds get used to less salt.

- Don't add salt to your food while cooking or at the table.
- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods.
- Eat less processed, packaged, or restaurant foods.
- Limit condiments and sauces (ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, gravies, and salad dressings).
- Limit pickled foods, olives, chutneys, and dips.
- To boost flavours, try adding spices, seasoning mixes with no salt added, lemon, lime, vinegar, fresh or dry herbs, garlic, or onions.

## Read food labels

Choose foods that are higher in protein and lower in sodium.

Page 1 has suggestions for how many servings of protein to have at meals and snacks.

Find the **servicing size**. If you eat more or less than this, adjust the nutrient amounts.

Choose foods with **more protein**.

Choose products with **less sodium**.

Nutrition Facts	
Per ¾ cup (175 g)	
<b>Calories 160</b>	<b>% Daily Value</b>
<b>Fat 3 g</b>	4 %
Saturated 1.5 g	8 %
+Trans 0 g	
<b>Carbohydrate 25 g</b>	
Fibre 3 g	11 %
Sugars 15 g	15 %
<b>Protein 8 g</b>	
<b>Cholesterol 10 mg</b>	3 %
<b>Sodium 75 mg</b>	3 %
Potassium 250 mg	5 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron 0 mg	0 %
*5% or less is a <b>little</b> , 15% or more is a <b>lot</b>	

## Should I take vitamin or mineral supplements?

People with cirrhosis can be low in some vitamins and minerals. Osteoporosis (weak bones) is common in liver disease. Getting enough vitamin D and calcium from food and/or supplements will help keep your bones strong.

Talk to your healthcare team about what kind of supplement is right for you. They may suggest:

- a multivitamin and mineral pill **with no iron** every day
- calcium or vitamin D pills