

High-protein doesn't mean high prices

By John Fike
The Low Budget Warrior
www.low-budget-warrior.com

Everybody's talking about protein these days. Used to be just bodybuilders and power lifters talked about protein, but now this essential nutrient has come to the forefront of the diet and weight-loss world too. Whereas dieters used to avoid animal meat like the plague because of the fat content, new weight-loss theology is pushing not only meat, but most forms of protein.

As with every diet craze that has ever come along, food manufacturers have launched numerous new food products that are high in protein and low in carbs to facilitate this latest diet gospel. And, as usual, all these products are priced outrageously. If you're into bodybuilding or power lifting, you've been into the high-protein, high-priced foods for some time.

Of all the diet fads to ever come along, I favor this high-protein approach the most. Protein has just received too little attention among nutritionists and diet folks in the past. Now, don't mistake me for being an Atkins fan. I'm not. Atkins is too far the other way; you can't maintain that kind of diet—all meat and fat, with little or no carbs—for a life time. I prefer a more balanced program like that touted by Dr. Al Sears in his book, *The Doctor's Heart Cure*. By recommending a diet that's got a significant protein content; lots of natural fruits, vegetables and nuts; and minimal refined starches and simple carbohydrates, Sears presents a very natural strategy for healthy eating. You can read more about Sears' book and his strategy at www.low-budget-warrior.com/HeartCure.

Anyway, the real point of this column is that you don't have to spend a fortune to get a healthy dose of protein. Besides, all those manufactured protein bars and synthetic foods can't be good for you. Here are six sources of affordable, high-quality protein. You'll see that coming up with 150 to 200 grams of protein a day can be tasty and economical.

1. Eggs—At 69 cents a dozen, and 7 grams per egg, egg protein costs less than a penny per gram. You can cut

down on the cholesterol in eggs by eating mostly egg whites instead of the yolks. Hardboiled eggs are easy to eat any time and are easy to take with you. (\$0.008 per gram)

2. Peanut Butter—Although not a complete protein, peanut butter can cost as little as a penny per gram of protein.
3. Protein mix—Believe it or not, as pricey as this stuff seems, powdered protein mix rings in at around 2 cents per gram of protein. One of my favorite brands, Optimum Nutrition costs even less at about 1.5 cents per gram of protein. Check it out at www.low-budget-warrior.com/Netrition.
4. Milk—Even at \$3 per gallon, milk protein still costs less than 2.5 cents per gram. A glass of milk can easily add 16 grams of protein to a meal, or add 8 grams to breakfast when poured over a bowl of cereal.
5. Beans—Like peanut butter, beans do not provide a complete protein so you have to combine them with milk or cheese. But bean protein costs only about 2.5 cents per gram.
6. Tuna & Chicken—these two meat products provide protein for as little as 3 cents per gram. Even as the highest priced item on this list, tuna and chicken cost less than the 5 cents per gram that the typical protein bar will set you back.

Here are a few ways to use these protein sources to create high-protein meals:

Power-packed breakfast gruel—Put two servings of oatmeal in a food processor and blend the oat till they're powdery. Then add two whole eggs, a couple of egg whites, a banana, a teaspoon of sugar or the equivalent amount of your favorite microwaveable sweetener, and a couple dashes of nutmeg. Blend it all together and pour it in a microwaveable bowl and nuke it till the center is

fluffy. Pour a bit of milk over it and eat. The batter can also be used to make pancakes on the griddle.

Homemade protein shake—Mix a quarter cup of powdered milk in two cups of skim or low-fat milk. Stir in a couple teaspoons of honey and drink.

Black bean tortilla—Cook up a batch of black beans, then smash them into a paste and flavor it with hot sauce and spices. Spread it on a tortilla and add a slice of cheese or two, lettuce, tomato and onion. Top it with some salsa, if you like, and roll it up to eat.

Peanut butter balls—Mix together equal portions of peanut butter, honey, powdered milk (not reconstituted), and wheat germ. Roll the mix into teaspoon-sized balls and refrigerate them on waxed paper. An excellent, high-protein snack when you crave something sweet.

Tuna in a can—Just eat all the tuna out of a 6 ounce can. Eat it straight from the can or add a condiment like Italian salad dressing, barbecue sauce, hot sauce, salsa, mustard, or whatever you have handy. Few sources of protein travel as well as a can of tuna.

Bon appetite. See ya next month.

The Low Budget Warrior