

Cheap High Protein Meals

Ingredient Swap List + Recipe Card | 100g Protein a Day for Under \$4

BUDGET HIGH PROTEIN FOOD LIST

Food	Serving	Protein	Approx. Cost	Cost / Gram
Dry lentils	1/4 cup dry	12g	\$0.10-\$0.15	\$0.008-\$0.012
Ground turkey (93% lean)	4 oz	28g	\$1.00-\$1.25	\$0.036-\$0.045
Canned tuna in water	1 can (5 oz)	25g	\$1.25-\$1.75	\$0.050-\$0.070
Eggs	1 large	6g	\$0.33-\$0.58	\$0.055-\$0.097
Canned beans	1/2 cup cooked	7g	\$0.40-\$0.55	\$0.057-\$0.079

INGREDIENT SWAP LIST

Eggs too expensive?

Replace each egg with 2 Tbsp dry lentils (cooked to ~1/3 cup). Protein holds at roughly 12g per swap.

No lentils?

Use 1/2 cup drained canned chickpeas in any formula. Protein drops slightly (7g vs. 12g) but prep is identical.

No black beans?

Kidney beans or chickpeas work in the turkey skillet. Protein yield is the same across all three.

No canned tuna?

Canned salmon delivers similar protein (about 22g per can) at a comparable price point in most markets.

No ground turkey?

93% lean ground chicken is a direct swap at similar cost and protein per ounce. Cook method is identical.

No rice?

Any cooked grain works as the base: oats, farro, or even a tortilla. None affect the protein count.

DAILY FORMULA (104g / ~\$3.85)

Meal	Formula	Protein
BREAKFAST	3 eggs + 1/2 cup cooked lentils	30g
LUNCH	1 can tuna + 1/2 cup chickpeas over rice	32g
DINNER	5 oz ground turkey + 1/2 cup black beans	42g
TOTAL		104g

\$30 WEEKLY GROCERY LIST (1 adult, 7 days)

Item	Qty	Cost
Dry lentils	1 lb	\$1.75
Canned tuna	5 cans	\$6.25
Black/kidney beans	3 cans	\$2.70
Canned chickpeas	2 cans	\$1.80
Eggs	1 dozen	\$4.50
Ground turkey (93%)	1.5 lbs	\$6.50
White or brown rice	2 lb bag	\$2.50
Subtotal		~\$26-28

RECIPE CARDS

Lentil Tuna Bowl

37g protein | ~\$1.60-\$2.00 | 8 min active
(lentils pre-cooked)

- 1 Drain 1 can tuna. Break apart with a fork in a wide bowl. Add a squeeze of lemon juice if it smells overly fishy.
- 2 Add 1/2 cup cooked lentils, still warm. Press lightly with a spoon so they crack and absorb the tuna liquid.
- 3 Dress with 1 Tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp vinegar, and a pinch of salt. Add any fridge extras: diced onion, cucumber, spinach.
- 4 Taste before serving. Flat means more salt. Heavy means more vinegar.

Swap: No lentils? Use 1/2 cup canned chickpeas (7g protein).

Ground Turkey and Black Bean Skillet

42g protein | ~\$2.00-\$2.50 | 15 min active

- 1 Heat 1 Tbsp oil in a skillet over medium-high until shimmering. Add 1/2 lb ground turkey, press flat. Do not stir for 2 full minutes.
- 2 Break turkey apart. Cook until no pink remains, 3-4 more minutes. Add 1/2 tsp cumin and 1/2 tsp garlic powder while still on heat.
- 3 Add 1 drained can of black beans. Stir, lower heat to medium, cook 2 minutes until beans are coated in turkey fat.
- 4 Taste for salt before plating. Serve over rice or eat from the skillet.

Swap: Any canned bean works. Kidney beans hold shape best; chickpeas add firmness.

Egg and Lentil Scramble

30g protein | ~\$1.20-\$1.65 | 10 min active

- 1 Warm 1/2 cup cooked lentils in a small skillet over medium heat with 1 tsp oil. Cook until edges start to dry and pan shows a faint fond, about 2 minutes.
- 2 Crack 3 eggs directly over lentils. Reduce heat to medium-low. Stir slowly with a wooden spoon as eggs begin to set.
- 3 Pull pan off heat while eggs still look slightly underdone. Carry-over heat finishes them in 30 seconds. Season with salt after plating.

Swap: No lentils? Use 1/2 cup drained canned beans. Texture is slightly softer.

THREE FIXES THAT MAKE CHEAP HIGH PROTEIN MEALS TASTE LIKE SOMETHING

Salt lentil cooking water

Water should taste lightly seasoned before lentils go in. Unsalted water means flat lentils no matter what you add after.

Add acid at the finish

A splash of vinegar or squeeze of lemon at the end makes existing flavor register more clearly. It doesn't add flavor, it activates it.

Don't crowd the turkey

Crowded protein steams instead of browns. Press flat, leave alone for 2 full minutes. Browning through Maillard reaction is where flavor comes from.