Protein and Muscle
This month your child learned what it takes to have healthy muscles and the benefits of having them. Muscles are a very important part of the body. The smooth muscles in the body help us to digest foods and breathe. Cardiac muscles help the heart pump our blood. Both of these types of muscle are involuntary, meaning they work without us even thinking about them. Skeletal muscle is the body’s third type of muscle. These muscles are the ones that help the body move when we want it to. Skeletal muscles are kept strong and healthy through regular exercise and by eating a healthy, balanced diet. Foods that are high in protein, such as meat, poultry, cheese, eggs, nuts, and beans are important in maintaining muscle. According to MyPyramid, children should get five ounces of foods from the meat and bean group, which includes meat, beans, nuts, eggs, and poultry. Children should also get three servings per day of foods from the dairy group, which includes milk, cheese, and yogurt. By ensuring your child is getting the appropriate servings from these two food groups, you are ensuring that he or she is getting enough protein. Protein is needed by all cells of the body to perform essential functions, not just muscle cells.

Another important factor in maintaining healthy muscles is physical activity. Exercises that build muscle strength include running, stair-climbing, and swimming. Activities that involve bearing weight, such as push-ups and pull-ups, are also good for building strong muscles. Remember, children should be getting 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

(Source: www.kidshealth.org)

Tips to help you make wise choices from the meat & beans group
(source: www.usda.gov)

Go lean with protein:

- Start with a lean choice:
  - Choose lean cuts of beef. The leanest cuts include round steaks and roasts (round eye, top round, bottom round, round tip), top loin, top sirloin, and chuck shoulder and arm roasts.
  - Choose lean cuts of pork, which include pork loin, tenderloin, center loin, and ham.
  - 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.
  - Buy skinless chicken parts, or take off the skin before cooking.
• Buy boneless skinless chicken breasts and turkey cutlets, which are the leanest poultry choices.
• Choose lean turkey, roast beef, ham, or low-fat luncheon meats for sandwiches instead of luncheon meats with more fat, such as regular bologna or salami.
• Keep 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.
  Some ideas are:
  • Salmon steak or filet
  • Salmon loaf
  • Grilled or baked trout
• Choose dry beans or peas as a main dish or part of a meal often. Some choices are:
  • Chili with kidney or pinto beans
  • Stir-fried tofu
  • Split pea, lentil, minestrone, or white bean soups
  • Baked beans
  • Black bean enchiladas
  • Garbanzo or kidney beans on a chef’s salad
  • Rice and beans
  • Veggie burgers or garden burgers
  • Hummus (chickpeas) spread on pita bread
• Choose nuts as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes. Use nuts to replace meat or poultry, not in addition, to these items:
  • Use pine nuts in pesto sauce for pasta.
  • Add slivered almonds to steamed vegetables.
  • Add toasted peanuts or cashews to a vegetable stir fry instead of meat.
  • Sprinkle a few nuts on top of low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt.
  • Add walnuts or pecans to a green salad instead of cheese or meat.