

## **Lean Beef Provides Power for Athletes**

By: Shelley Johnson, RD, Associate Director of Food and Nutrition Outreach for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Whether you're a seasoned Ironman competitor or just getting into a training program, you know it's vital to fuel your body with the nutrients it needs to power you through to personal performance goals and withstand the stress of training.

Ongoing scientific research continues to confirm that one of the most powerful nutrients to help strengthen and sustain us is protein, especially the high-quality kind found in lean beef. Protein's main role is to build and repair body tissue, like muscles and organs; support the immune system; and help move more vitamins, minerals and other nutrients throughout the body – just the nutritional support you need to train and compete.

Calorie-for-calorie, beef is one of the most naturally nutrient-rich foods. On average, a 3-ounce serving of lean beef is only 154 calories, yet it provides 10 essential nutrients to the diet, including iron, zinc and B vitamins.<sup>1</sup>

Think the words “lean” and “beef” don't fit in the same sentence? You may be surprised to learn that there are 29 cuts of beef that meet government requirements for lean, including favorites like T-Bone steak, Tenderloin and 95 percent lean Ground Beef. These 29 cuts all have less than 10 grams of total fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per serving and per 100 grams.<sup>1</sup>

A substantial body of evidence shows that the nutrients in lean beef can help maintain a healthy weight, build muscle and fuel physical activity. High-quality protein plays an increasingly important role in muscle maintenance and repair; bone health; disease prevention and weight maintenance. A study from the *Journal of Nutrition* demonstrated that a protein-rich diet, combined with exercise and reduced carbohydrates, improved body composition, reduced triglycerides and maintained HDL (good) cholesterol levels. Researchers found that the high quality protein, like that found in lean beef, contains a high level of an amino acid that works with insulin to promote muscle growth.<sup>2</sup>

Keep in mind, though, that not all proteins are created equal. High-quality or “complete” proteins – like lean beef – contain all the essential amino acids in the appropriate amounts we need.

Animal proteins are also highly digestible. For example, meat and cheese have a digestibility rate of about 95 percent, while cooked split peas are about 70 percent digestible. Beef, dairy, pork, eggs, fish and poultry are all highly digestible and complete. When you eat appropriate portions of these foods, your body will be able to use the nutrients right away. When you eat protein with a variety of other foods after training or after an endurance event, you are putting back nutrients you have used and maintaining stores you worked hard to create.

Beef also tastes great, and works well with a variety of recipes and cooking methods. It fits easily into the diet, pairs well with lots of fruits and vegetables and when it's on the dinner table, you don't have to worry about whether or not you're getting all the proper nutrients you need for fitness. Plus, beef is family-friendly. It's a nutrient rich food you can enjoy with family and friends without having to make something extra to meet your own training needs.

Powering up with protein and other essential nutrients found in lean beef is easy. For example, add a side of scrambled eggs to your pancakes at breakfast, or include lean Ground Beef to your breakfast burrito. Enjoy a lunch salad by adding Flank steak strips or boiled egg, or fill a vegetable wrap with slices of grilled Top Sirloin. For dinner, make a colorful, zesty stir fry by adding lean Top Sirloin to a skillet loaded with peppers, pea pods, broccoli, etc.

Including lean protein in the diet can optimize your energy and training regimen. For more information, and hundreds of easy, delicious recipes (with nutritional details), visit [BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com).

#### Added Lean Beef Highlights:

- A 3-ounce serving of lean beef contains about the same amount of protein as 1 ½ cups of beans, but in half the calories.
- That 3-ounce serving of lean beef actually saves calories. You'd have to eat more than 7 tablespoons of peanut butter (680 calories) to get the same amount of protein.
- Unlike plant proteins, high-quality protein like lean beef is the food supply's most easily absorbed source of iron and zinc. A primary function of iron is to help red blood cells carry oxygen to body tissues. Zinc is associated with building muscles, healing wounds and aiding cognitive health.
- Beef is an excellent source of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, an essential nutrient not readily available in plant proteins. This vitamin is important for metabolism, the formation of red blood cells and maintenance of the central nervous system.

1. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 22, 2009.
2. Layman DK, Evans E, Baum JI, et al. Dietary protein and exercise have additive effects on body composition during weight loss in adult women. *J Nutr.* 2005;135:1903–10.