

Plant Power On the Plate: Facts About Plant-Based Meat Alternatives

Plant-based meat alternatives (PBMA) are a fast-growing food on the market, but it's normal to have questions.¹ With the help of dietitians, we're answering them.



Not only can plant-based meats be part of a balanced, plant-forward eating pattern, but they can help diversify protein choices, supply a variety of nutrients, and still deliver taste and satisfaction.^{2,3} Here's what you need to know as you make the choice that works best for you (and your family).



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Sustainable Choices, Big Impact

Making the swap to PBMA helps shift towards eating more plants, which aligns with environmental reasons.^{2,3,4} In developed countries like the USA, two-thirds of protein intake comes from animal sources.³ **Enjoying a plant-based meat alternative is a practical and achievable way to increase the dietary plant-to-animal protein ratio** from about 1:2 to 1:1.^{2,3}

Serving Size: What to Know

A daily serving of plant-based meat can fit into a healthy diet.³ Keep in mind, this is individualized. The nutrition varies in products – with some containing higher amounts of saturated fat and sodium, and less fiber and micronutrients, depending on formulation and fortification.^{2,3} Consider overall food intake, serving these in addition to other whole foods throughout the day.

We Asked A Dietitian To Answer Your Most Popular Questions— Here's What She Said

Are PBMA healthier than regular meat?

“Both PBMA and animal meats can be included as part of a healthy, balanced diet.^{2,3} Incorporating PBMA helps gradually shift consumers’ dietary choices to incorporate more plant protein into their meals in a convenient, easy-to-use way.³ Plus, PBMA may help increase dietary fiber and decrease saturated fat intake in the standard American diet.³”

Are they ultra-processed, and should I be worried about that?

“According to the Nova classification system, PBMA are classified as ultra-processed.^{3,5} However, this classification is solely based on the degree of processing, not the nutrient density of the food. Studies have shown that the nutrient density of PBMA can support not only a healthy lifestyle but may also improve cardiometabolic health and support weight control.^{3,6-13}”

What are PBMA made of?

“PBMA are made from familiar foods like soy, peas, and wheat, but in more concentrated forms.^{2,3,14} By using protein from these plants, food makers can create products with protein levels similar to animal-based meats. ”

Do plant-based meats provide enough protein and iron compared to animal sources?

“Nutrient fortification allows PBMA to deliver protein and iron content similar to animal sources.^{2,3,4} Individual brands vary; it’s best to take a closer look at the nutrition facts panel to ensure the product you’re selecting meets your target nutrient needs.^{2,3}”

Should I be concerned about the fat content of PBMA?

“Paying attention to the type of fat in the PBMA you choose is important, especially if you have a history of cardiovascular disease.¹⁵ Consider a product that uses soybean oil versus coconut oil to keep the saturated fat content in check. For reference, 1 tablespoon of soybean oil = 2 grams of saturated fat and 1 tablespoon of coconut oil = 11 grams of saturated fat.^{16,17}”

Nutrient Comparison Chart ¹⁸

Let's take a closer look at how nutrients in PBMA stack up with similar animal-based prepared food counterparts.

Quick Tip: PBMA vary widely in their ingredients, with some offering more of a specific nutrient than others.^{2,3} Keep this in mind as you make PBMA recommendations to your clients to find the brands that work best for their personal nutrition needs.

PBMA Burger*



Weight (g)	115
Calories	240
Total Fat (g)	15
Saturated Fat (g)	6.5
Sodium (mg)	420
Total Carb (g)	9
Fiber (g)	4
Protein (g)	20
Iron (mg)	3.4

Processed Beef Burger Patty*



Weight (g)	133
Calories	320
Total Fat (g)	25
Saturated Fat (g)	9.5
Sodium (mg)	90
Total Carb (g)	0
Fiber (g)	0
Protein (g)	22
Iron (mg)	2.7

PBMA Breaded Chicken Tenders*



Weight (g)	85
Calories	220
Total Fat (g)	13
Saturated Fat (g)	2.5
Sodium (mg)	560
Total Carb (g)	16
Fiber (g)	3
Protein (g)	10
Iron (mg)	1.7

Breaded Chicken Tenders*



Weight (g)	211
Calories	470
Total Fat (g)	6
Saturated Fat (g)	1.0
Sodium (mg)	430
Total Carb (g)	14
Fiber (g)	1
Protein (g)	11
Iron (mg)	0.73

PBMA Hot Dog*



Weight (g)	49
Calories	100
Total Fat (g)	6
Saturated Fat (g)	0.5
Sodium (mg)	420
Total Carb (g)	4
Fiber (g)	0
Protein (g)	7
Iron (mg)	1.12

All-Beef Processed Hot Dog*



Weight (g)	60
Calories	170
Total Fat (g)	15
Saturated Fat (g)	7.0
Sodium (mg)	620
Total Carb (g)	1
Fiber (g)	0
Protein (g)	7
Iron (mg)	0.6

PBMA Sausage*



Weight (g)	88
Calories	200
Total Fat (g)	13
Saturated Fat (g)	1.0
Sodium (mg)	470
Total Carb (g)	7
Fiber (g)	3.0
Protein (g)	15
Iron (mg)	2.47

Italian Pork Sausage*



Weight (g)	72
Calories	250
Total Fat (g)	21
Saturated Fat (g)	7
Sodium (mg)	490
Total Carb (g)	2
Fiber (g)	0
Protein (g)	13
Iron (mg)	0.72

*: Values for each are a composite of different brands.¹⁸



Insight Spotlight: Nutrient Fortification

While catchy headlines may have you wondering if PBMA can deliver similar nutrient density, the data here show they can. Many brands are fortified with shortfall nutrients, like iron, zinc, and vitamin B12 to more closely resemble the nutrition profile of animal proteins.³

Meal Planning IDEAS

PBMA products make navigating mealtime a breeze. Try them for yourself in one of these RD-Approved Meal Ideas below!

Today's MENU

Morning Favorites Made Easy:

Make-Ahead Breakfast Sandwiches

Layer plant-based sausage or bacon, an egg, and cheese on an English muffin. Wrap and refrigerate until ready to eat. Reheat in the microwave for a grab-and-go meal.

Savory Veggie Muffin Cups

Mix chopped plant-based sausage with veggies, eggs, chopped bell peppers and onions, and fresh herbs. Bake in muffin tins for portable eggless "frittatas" (that can also easily be tossed between a whole-grain English muffin for a quick sandwich).

Breakfast Hash

Dice sweet potatoes and sauté with onions, peppers, and plant-based chorizo for a nutrient-rich skillet meal that can be wrapped in a tortilla if you're on the run.

Veggie Sausage & Avocado Toast

Pop a plant-based sausage patty in the microwave. Serve open-faced on a thick slice of whole-grain toast with smashed avocado, tomatoes, and a drizzle of hot sauce.

Try the
SOY SPECIALS!

Main Meals In No Time:

Street-Style Tacos

Sauté plant-based chorizo with onions and peppers, then serve in a tortilla with salsa, shredded cabbage or lettuce, and cilantro on top. Drizzle with hot sauce.

Sloppy-Joe Sandwich

Heat a PBMA, like a ground crumble, with BBQ sauce. Layer between a whole-grain bun and serve with a side salad, like coleslaw.

Mediterranean Grain Bowl

Start with a base of quinoa (or an alternative cooked whole grain of choice). Top with a variety of veggies, like tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, and spinach. Add a few ounces of plant-based chicken strips on top. Drizzle with a Greek dressing.

Veggie & Beef Ramen Salad

Start with a base of ramen noodles then add shredded carrots, cabbage, bell peppers, and edamame. Add a PBMA like chicken or beef, then drizzle with teriyaki sauce or sesame dressing.

One-Pan Jambalaya

Combine brown rice, diced tomatoes, celery, onion, peppers, and plant-based sausage in a pot with vegetable broth and preferred seasonings. Simmer until the grains are tender.

Shepherd's Pie with Lentils & Plant-Based Crumbles

Mix cooked lentils, carrots, peas, and plant-based ground meat with a mushroom soup (vegan soup options are available here, too). Top with mashed potatoes, preferred cheese, and bake until the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees F.

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