

Nutrition Guide to
PROTEIN



MORE THAN

muscle

While we all have different nutritional needs and preferences, protein is a crucial nutrient we should strive to include as part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. This guide provides ideas for enjoying a variety of well-sourced animal and plant protein sources with tips on how to meet your protein needs.

Why focus on protein?

Taking a wider view, nutrients are compounds found in food that supply energy for body processes. The three macronutrients are carbohydrates, fats, and protein. A healthy diet is comprised of all three macronutrients in a balance that works for you.

Protein is made up of amino acids that our bodies cannot create and must be obtained from food. They are the building blocks of our cells, tissues, muscles, bones, skin, and hair. Proteins enhance the body's ability to carry out daily functions, regulate hormones, and repair our cells. Protein also helps keep us feeling full and satiated after a meal or snack. This only scratches the surface for the importance of this macronutrient!

Regardless if you are vegan, vegetarian, or a carnivore, a protein-rich diet is achievable no matter your dietary preference.



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protein BENEFITS

Age Gracefully

Studies have shown that those who eat more protein tend to maintain bone mass better as they age and also have a lower risk of osteoporosis and fractures (1). Adequate protein protects against muscle loss that occurs with age and also has a positive effect on longevity (3).

Fire up your Metabolism

Your body burns more calories digesting protein than it does digesting fat or carbohydrates. That said, a higher protein intake has been shown to boost metabolism throughout the day as well as preserve more muscle mass, both of which contribute to a stronger metabolism (1).

Regulate Hunger

Out of the three macronutrients, protein is by far the most satiating. Since protein regulates the hormones responsible for making you feel hungry and full, eating enough protein can help someone achieve their fat loss goals by reducing cravings, keeping you satiated, along with firing up the metabolism (1).

Boost your Brain

Did you know protein is the second largest matter in the brain? Protein helps neurons communicate with each other through neurotransmitters made from amino acids (which is what protein is made up of!) Our bodies cannot make amino acids on their own, and they must come from our food. To keep your brain healthy, it is important to nourish your brain with protein rich foods from quality sources (2).

Balance Hormones

Along with healthy fats, protein is one of the main building blocks of hormone production. Adequate protein intake can help regulate the many different hormones involved with energy, maintain healthy body weight, metabolism, and menstrual cycles in women (3).



protein REQUIREMENTS

How much protein you need each day depends on many factors including but not limited to your age, activity level, health goals, and overall health. However, a good place to start is aiming for 20–30 grams of protein at each meal (3). You may find it beneficial to consult with your doctor to determine your individual protein needs.

PLANT sources

The earth we live on provides an abundance of protein-rich plant foods. Regardless if one chooses to eat animal products or not, striving to include a variety of plant-based protein sources in our diet will go a long way with our own health and the health of our planet.

Lentils

Beans (cannellini, black, garbanzo, kidney, pinto etc.)

Green peas

Edamame

Peanuts

Soybeans (tofu, tempeh)

Nuts (almonds, pistachios, cashews, walnuts, hazelnuts, pecans, etc.)

Seeds (hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, chia seeds, etc.)

Whole Grains (quinoa, kamut, teff, amaranth, wheat, wild rice, millet, farro, etc.)



ANIMAL sources

Not all animal protein is created equal. It is a good practice to try to look for non-GMO, grass-fed and pasture-raised animal products whenever possible and consider supporting your local farms! If you have trouble finding good options locally, these days there are many cost-effective online delivery services for getting sustainably sourced animal products right to your door.

Poultry (chicken, turkey, etc.)

Fish (salmon, anchovies, mackerel, tuna, sardines, sea bass, etc.)

**Enjoy wild-caught when possible*

Crustaceans (oysters, mussels, shrimp, lobster, etc.)

Eggs

Dairy (greek yogurt, cottage cheese, milk, etc.)

Red Meat (beef, pork, bison, lamb, etc.)

**Enjoy in moderation and opt for lean cuts*

Processed Meats (hot dogs, sausage, bacon, canned meat, etc.)

**Enjoy sparingly*



What about protein powder supplements?

A protein supplement is not required but can be helpful for those short on time or simply anyone trying to reach their protein goals. If whey protein gives you digestive upset or you simply prefer a plant-based option, look for pea protein, hemp protein, or a combination of plants. Watch out for added sugars or artificial ingredients! As a rule of thumb, typically the shorter the ingredient list, the better.

TIPS FOR

meeting protein needs



Protein at every meal

Strive to include a source of plant based or animal protein at every meal to make sure you are meeting your protein goals which will also help keep you full for longer. Research suggests that eating your protein first may help balance blood sugar levels for longer periods.

Variety is the spice of life

Vary the sources of protein you consume each week to ensure you are getting a wide variety of nutrients that each source has to offer! Make it a game: each week you could challenge yourself to try a new type of protein you've never had before, based off the lists on the previous page.



Post-workout repair

Aim to consume a protein rich meal or snack after your workout to ensure your body gets the amino acids it needs in order to repair the muscles that were broken down during exercise.

Plant power with hemp hearts

Hemp hearts contain 10 grams of protein in each 3 tablespoon serving. They have a versatile nuttiness and subtle texture that make them easy to add to smoothies, salads, oatmeal, soups, and so much more! They also happen to be chock full of healthy omega 3 fats and vital nutrients like magnesium, fiber, zinc, and iron.



Protein rich snacks

When hunger strikes and you are reaching for that box of crackers, pair them with a handful of nuts, seeds, hummus, or a few slices of cheese to round out the carbohydrates with protein which will keep you full for longer. Another idea is pairing an apple or strawberries with a spoon of almond or peanut butter. On the go? A smoothie made with greek yogurt, nuts and seeds, or quality protein powder is also great option.

FOOTNOTES



- (1) Gunnars, K. (2023) 10 science-backed reasons to eat more protein, Healthline. Available at: https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-reasons-to-eat-more-protein#TOC_TITLE_HDR_6 (Accessed: 15 August 2023).
- (2) 15 'Brain foods' that may help preserve your memory (no date) UnityPoint Health. Available at: <https://www.unitypoint.org/news-and-articles/15-brain-foods-that-may-help-preserve-your-memory#:~:text=Protein%20is%20the%20second%20largest,are%20made%20from%20amino%20acids>. (Accessed: 15 August 2023).
- (3) Doctortaz.com (2023) How much protein do I really need?, Dr. Taz Bhatia M.D. Available at: <https://doctortaz.com/how-much-protein-do-i-really-need/> (Accessed: 15 August 2023).