



Protein



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Protein is made of amino acids and is found throughout the body in muscle, bone, skin, hair, and virtually every other body cell.

Protein has different roles in our brain, heart, liver and other organs. It is in the antibodies that fight infection, in the immune system, and the red blood cells that carry oxygen in our blood.

Protein is important for keeping muscles, bones and tissues healthy and is an essential part of any diet.

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What foods and drinks contain protein?

A lot of different foods and drinks provide protein, including beans, eggs, fish, meat and poultry, milk, cheese, yoghurt and nuts. Both animal and plants foods can be a good source of protein.

Animal protein

It's recommended we have two portions of **fish** each week, one of which should be an oily fish. Fish that is steamed, baked or grilled is a healthier choice than deep-fried fish. Fresh, canned and frozen fish are all healthy choices too.

Eggs are a good source of protein. You do not need to stop eating eggs due to cholesterol concerns and they can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet.

Meat and poultry are good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals. Poultry like chicken is lower in saturated fat than red meat. You can reduce fat by choosing leaner cuts and cutting off any extra fat. Processed meats like ham, bacon, sausages or salami should be eaten in moderation, however, as they can be high in saturated fat and salt.

Dairy foods can contain high levels of saturated fat so it's recommended we choose reduced fat versions of milk, cheese and yoghurt most of the time.

Plant protein

All types of **beans** (e.g. kidney, butter or baked beans), **chickpeas** and **lentils** all provide a plant-based source of protein. They can be a good choice as they are a cheap, low-fat source of protein and fibre. It's recommended we include one portion per day. They are a good alternative to meat, and good for adding into other dishes such as stews, curries or pasta sauces.

All **nuts and seeds** count, including nut butters or seed pastes. Nuts are high in fibre and unsaturated fats and are great as a snack or added to meals like salad or stir fries. Choose plain, unsalted versions to limit added sugars and salts.

A range of other sources are available including foods made from **soya** such as tofu. There are many products designed as **plant-based alternatives to meat** products such as vegetarian sausages and burgers. These can be healthy choices, but this is not always the case. It's a good idea to check nutrition labels and to choose those lower in saturated fat, salt and sugars.

How much protein should we eat?

Most of us already eat enough protein and do not need to add any more into our diet. For anyone who follows a vegan or vegetarian diet, however, a wider variety of protein sources should be eaten to get the best quality.

We should eat five or six portions of protein foods every day. Two or three of these should be dairy or dairy alternatives.



We should eat a variety of protein foods. For example, one portion of chicken, a handful of kidney beans, a small piece of cheese, one fillet of fish, one egg, and a handful of nuts in one day would provide a good balance and six portions.

Example of a portion include:

- A handful of lentils or beans (120g)
- A small handful of unsalted nuts or seeds (20g)
- One tablespoon of peanut butter (20g)
- One chicken breast about half the size of your hand (120g)
- Two eggs
- One salmon fillet about half the size of your hand (100-140g)
- Four tablespoons of yoghurt (120g)
- A glass of milk (200ml)
- A portion of cheese about the size of your thumb (20g)

Protein and weight loss

High-protein diets for weight loss have been around for many years and there's lots of evidence that supports the idea that eating good quality sources of protein helps reduce hunger and maintain fullness for longer so we eat less.

Diets that cut out other foods groups like fats and carbohydrates should be avoided as this will not benefit health long term. Also, if we eat too much protein that the body does not need, this will be converted and stored as fat.

Foods are not made up of one type of nutrient. Evidence tells us that it is the type of protein rather than the amount of protein that likely makes the difference for our health. When we eat foods for protein, we also eat everything that comes alongside it such as the different fats, fibre and salt.

Each of the below examples are a great source of protein, but also come with other nutrients.

- **Beef steak** is a great source of protein, but it is also high in saturated fat.
- **Gammon steak** is lower in saturated fat than beef steak, but also contains a high amount of salt.
- **A handful of kidney beans** provides fibre and virtually no saturated fat or salt.
- **A salmon fillet** is naturally low in salt and contains a small amount of fat. Salmon and other oily fish are also a great source of omega-3 fatty acids.

It's important to consider the type of protein we eat and limit the amount of saturated fat and salt that these foods contain. Eating healthy protein sources like beans, nuts, fish or poultry in place of red and processed meat can lower the risk of several chronic diseases.



Protein supplements and shakes

There's a large industry and marketing push for protein-packed foods - from powders and shakes to added protein in cereals and chocolate bars. The food industry knows the benefits of protein and uses this to sell food to us.

However, most of us are eating enough protein already. We do not need to add protein supplements or special products with added protein to our diets. Unless your exercise routine is particularly strenuous and demanding, you can still get enough protein from your usual foods.

People who have intensive training schedules may find having protein supplements, drinks or bars more convenient. However, it's important to try and get protein from 'real' foods as they provide other essential nutrients in our diet. If you choose to consume protein powder, it's important to read the nutrition and ingredient labels beforehand, as products may contain unexpected ingredients and large amounts of added sugars and calories.

Is animal or plant-based protein better for us?

Research has found that if we changed from our average diet in the UK to a more plant-based diet, it would improve our health as well as reducing the impact on the environment. To achieve this, eating more beans and pulses, having two portions of fish a week and reducing red or processed meat is recommended.

For many of us, eating more beans, lentils, nuts and other plant-based proteins would be a healthy way to get some of the protein we need, as well as providing us with fibre and other nutrients. This doesn't mean we need to cut out meat or animal products, but look at ways we could eat a wider variety of protein sources.

If you eat vegetarian or vegan, you need to make sure you are getting plenty of plant-based protein foods. Most vegetarians get enough protein in their diets, but it's important to include a wide variety of foods that also provide other vitamins and minerals.

Animal protein is considered 'better quality' than protein from plant sources. This does not mean it is healthier, but it has a complete set of all the amino acids the body needs. But as long as we eat a varied diet, we should get all the protein and amino acids we need to be healthy.

Final thought

Eating more proteins from plant based foods will benefit our health by reducing saturated fat and calories, but we need to make sure we eat a good variety of foods.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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