

Protein

Protein is an important nutrient, but it is only one of many nutrients that our bodies need to maintain good health. When most people think of protein, they think of meat. While meat is a good source of protein, so are many vegetables, whole grains, beans, eggs and dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Protein requirements vary depending on your weight and how much you exercise. For healthy adults, the recommended amount of protein for adults is 0.8 g/kilograms (kg) of body weight each day. To figure out your weight in kilograms, take your weight in pounds and divide it by 2.2. So, a 150 pound person would need about 55 g protein/day:

$$150 \text{ pounds} / 2.2 = 68.2 \text{ kg} \times 0.8 \text{ g/kg} = 54.6 \text{ g}$$

For athletes, the recommended intake is increased to 1.2 – 1.7 g/kg (.5 - .65 g/lb) a day. For a 150 pound person, that is about 82 – 95 g protein/day. Athletes require more protein because protein helps repair small tears in muscle fibers caused by intense workouts. Also, when your body runs out of carbohydrates to burn during exercise, it uses protein for energy instead. While athletes need more protein, they tend to eat more overall and are likely meeting their increased protein needs through their normal diet.

Eating more protein does not translate into bigger muscles. Muscle building occurs when you exercise at high intensities. Excess protein that is over and above a person's overall protein and energy needs is converted to fat and stored as fat.

It is recommended that you meet your protein needs through whole foods such as meat, vegetables, whole grains, beans, eggs and dairy instead of using supplements and protein powders. On average, adults in the US eat more protein than they need.

Take a look at the amount of protein in the following foods:

Foods with 2 g of protein:

- ½ cup cooked non-starchy vegetables
- ½ cup vegetable juice
- 1 cup raw non-starchy vegetables

Foods with 3 g of protein:

- ½ cup cereal
- ½ cup pasta
- ½ cup starchy vegetable (potato, peas, corn)
- 1 ounce of bread (~1 slice)

Foods with 7 g of protein:

- 1 oz meat, poultry, or fish
- 1 oz cheese
- ½ cup dried beans
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter

Foods with 8 g of protein:

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup yogurt

