

# Health Benefits of Protein: Sources, Side Effects, & Dosage

Protein has become mainstream over the last few years. Forget checking calories or fat content — most of us are reaching straight for the label to see what items pack a protein punch. But how much protein do we actually need? And what are the best foods for getting it?

## How Do We Get Protein?

Protein itself is a long chain of units called amino acids. There are twenty different types of amino acids in total, and while our body is able to manufacture most of them by itself, if we're running low, there are eight that we must get solely from our diet. These eight are called "essential amino acids": since our body needs them in diet form in order to keep running efficiently. It's these eight essential amino acids which we refer to when we talk about increasing our protein.

There's one more thing you need to know about the way we get protein into to our bodies: not all protein is the same. This is why chowing down on a plate of pulses doesn't necessarily give you the same protein boost as a plate of meat.

Protein is further classified into "incomplete" and "complete" protein. If a source of protein contains all eight of those crucial amino acids, then it's classified as a complete protein. If not? It's "incomplete" protein, and you'll need to make sure you couple it with another protein source to ensure you're getting everything you need.

## What Are the Best Sources of Protein?

The best sources of protein are undoubtedly complete proteins, which consist largely of meat, milk, and eggs. While this suggests we need to eat meat to get a healthy amount of protein, this is not necessarily the case. Cow's milk is an excellent complete protein source, and for those who can't drink cow's milk, alternatives such as camel milk can provide the same benefits. In fact, camel

milk actually contains more protein than cow's milk.

Vegans tend to rely on a diet of nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, and vegetables. These do contain protein but are often incomplete sources, and as a result, they are not ideal for the body. However, with some savvy diet planning, there's no reason vegans can't also eat a diet plentiful in protein too. The trick is to team these incomplete proteins together to make a perfect combination. For example, while beans and rice by themselves are incomplete, combined together, they make a complete protein containing all eight of the amino acids. Many cultures have traditional vegetarian dishes that combine two incomplete protein sources (e.g. rice and tofu, corn and beans, etc.)

## **How Does Protein Help the Body?**

Protein is used by every cell in our body so it's hard to think of a bodily function that it isn't needed for. It does everything from helping repair tissues to making hormones to supporting our bones. The food we eat constantly breaks down proteins. As a result, if we're not ingesting enough of it, our body quickly runs into problems.

Here are some symptoms of protein deficiency:

- Slow wound healing
- Low energy
- Muscle and joint pain
- Difficulties in controlling blood sugar
- Sluggish metabolism
- Low mood

Given the high amounts of refined sugar that much of the population consumes, protein is also vital for controlling our blood sugar levels — and even preventing diabetes. Adequate protein intake across the whole day keeps our blood sugar stable, preventing cravings and sudden energy dips.

## **How Much Protein Do I Need?**

Information regarding the amount of protein we need is often conflicting.

While some specialists believe there's really no limit, others suggest stricter guidelines so we're not simply loading up on meat. Your daily protein intake depends on other factors, too, including:

- Your age
- Your gender
- Your level of activity

To account for this, it's estimated you'll need a minimum of around 0.8g of protein for every kilogram you weigh. You may want to consume much more than this if you are very active, recovering from an injury, or are elderly — to help prevent loss of muscle mass or osteoporosis.

## **Do I Need to Take a Protein Supplement?**

Protein supplements are everywhere these days — it's hard to miss them on the supermarket shelves: promising everything from gaining muscle to staving off hunger. However, if you're consuming a healthy diet and not training for a big sporting event, then these powders simply aren't necessary. In fact, relying on these can even be dangerous, as you're likely to miss out on fiber and other key nutrients other protein sources contain.

Getting your protein from a varied diet (i.e. meat, milk, beans, grains, and seeds) means you won't miss out on other key nutrients that your body needs. If you often start the day with a protein shake, then try some creative camel milk recipes. Mixing some camel milk with almonds, spinach, and chia seeds in a blender helps create a quick, affordable protein shake in seconds — with no powders required.

Adding protein to your diet doesn't have to be complicated. Eating a well-balanced diet should be enough to ensure you're getting everything your body needs.

Got any suggestions about how to get more protein into your diet? Let us know!