

# Health Tips

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## Health Tip: How much protein do we need?



The idea that we need to eat more protein has become popular over the last few years. Many people believe that eating a high protein diet will lead to improved muscle development and weight loss. Clearly, everyone needs protein in their diet in order for their bodies to function normally. Protein is the major constituent of muscle, skin, and connective tissue and is essential to the function of hormones and enzyme systems in the body. Despite popular

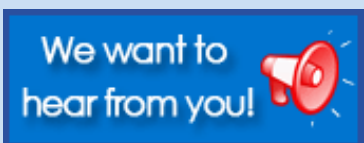
opinion regarding the benefits of high protein diets, however, there's no scientific evidence that most Americans need more protein than they are currently receiving. Let's take a look at what protein is and how much we need for good health.

**What is protein?** Protein is made of building blocks known as amino acids. Twenty different amino acids are required to build all of the necessary types of protein for the body to function normally. Eight of these amino acids, called "essential" amino acids, cannot be made by the body and must come from dietary sources. The other twelve can be produced within our bodies. Dietary sources of protein are considered to be either "complete" or "incomplete" depending on their amino acid makeup. A complete protein source, such as meat or eggs, includes all of the essential amino acids. An incomplete protein source, usually from plants, lacks one or more of the essential amino acids that humans require.

**How much protein is necessary for good health?** As a general rule, 10 to 15 percent of your total calories should come from protein. So, if you consume 2,500 calories per day, at least 250 of them should come from protein, which amounts to about 62 grams. You can also calculate your dietary protein requirement by following these simple steps:

1. Divide your weight in pounds by 2.2 - this will give you your weight in kilograms (kg). For example: if you weigh 180 pounds,  $180 / 2.2 = 81.8$  kg
2. Next, multiply this number by 0.8 which is the number of grams of protein that you need each day. Example:  $81.8 \times 0.8g = 65.4$ ;

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3. Therefore, this person would need to eat about 65 grams of protein per day.

While 65 grams of protein may seem like a lot, most Americans exceed this daily requirement regularly. Here are some examples of common foods and the amount of protein that they contain:

- **Beef**
  - Hamburger patty, 4 oz - 28 grams protein
  - Most cuts of beef - 7 grams protein per ounce
- **Chicken**
  - Chicken breast, 4 oz - 35 grams protein
- **Fish**
  - Most fish fillets or steaks, 4 oz - 25 grams protein
  - Tuna 6-oz can - 40 grams protein
- **Eggs and dairy**
  - Egg, large - 6 grams protein
  - Milk, 1 cup - 8 grams
  - Yogurt, 1 cup - 8 - 12 grams
  - Cheeses (Cheddar, Swiss) - 7 or 8 grams per oz
- **Beans (including soy)**
  - Tofu, 1/2 cup - 20 grams protein
  - Most beans - 7 to 10 grams per half cup
  - Soy beans, 1/2 cup cooked - 14 grams protein
- **Whole grains**
  - One slice whole wheat bread - 3 grams protein
- **Nuts and Seeds**
  - Peanut butter, 2 tablespoons - 8 grams protein
  - Flaxseeds, 1/4 cup - 8 grams

In order to determine the number of grams of protein that you consume on a daily basis, you would have to add up all of the protein-grams from the food that you ate that day. A more complete listing of foods and their protein content can be seen by going [here](#).

**Do some people require more protein than others?** Protein needs for athletes are greater than the recommended 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight recommended for sedentary people. Most authorities recommend anywhere from 1.2 to 1.4 grams of protein per kilogram of weight for endurance athletes, such as marathoners, and up to 1.8 grams of protein per kilogram for bodybuilders. It should be noted, however, that eating additional protein alone will not lead to increased muscle development. Resistance (weight) training must be combined with the additional protein consumption in order for this to occur. Other "special needs" groups in regard to protein requirement include pregnant women, adolescents, and the elderly. Even in these groups, however, additional protein requirements are modest, in the range of an additional 0.2 to 0.4 grams per kilogram of body weight per day.

**Can you get too much protein?** In healthy individuals, there is no evidence that protein intake in excess of 2.0 grams per kilogram of body weight provides additional health benefits over the recommended amounts discussed. In certain people with chronic liver or kidney disease, even this amount of protein can be harmful. Despite this, many people supplement their diets with protein shakes or energy bars with the mistaken assumption that more protein must be better.



**What are the best sources of protein?** The best way to get an adequate amount of protein is to eat a variety of foods each day. It is fairly easy for those of us who eat meat to get adequate amounts of protein with all of the necessary amino acids in our diets. By combining vegetable sources with different types of amino acids, vegetarians are also able to obtain all of the necessary amino acids. Examples of eating "complementary" protein sources in order to create a complete protein are eating beans and tortillas or peanut butter and bread.

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