



The Power of Protein

By Jennifer Lintz, RD, LD

While it may be well-known that individuals of all ages need protein, the details on why, how much, and the best sources are not always as clear. Let's break down some of the top questions people have about protein and review a few practical tips to keep in mind.

Why do I need it?

Protein is responsible for more than we may realize. While it often gets credit for helping during periods of growth – childhood, adolescence, and pregnancy – it also plays key roles in metabolism, immune function, and tissue repair. It is found in every cell of the human body, so it is in our best interest to consume protein on a daily basis.

How much should I have?

The average adult needs anywhere from 46 to 56 grams of protein per day¹, but the exact amount we need depends on overall health, age, gender and activity level.

To the right is an example of what 54 grams of protein might look like over the course of a day². Keep in mind that the protein content of foods varies, so it is always a good idea to read food labels and check brand web sites for nutrition information to be sure how much you're getting. Though it may come as a surprise, most of us can get what we need from several servings of protein-rich foods throughout the day. Supplementation in the form of shakes, powders, and bars is usually not necessary.

| Sample Day | | Protein |
|--------------|---|-----------------|
| Breakfast | Scrambled Egg (1 whole) Whole Wheat Toast (1 slice) Orange (1 medium) | 11 grams |
| Snack | Apple (1 medium) Peanut Butter (1 Tbsp) | 4 grams |
| Lunch | Whole Wheat Tortilla (1) Turkey (4 deli slices) Lettuce (1/4 cup) Tomato (1 slice) | 14 grams |
| Snack | Cheese Slice (1 ounce) Grapes (15) | 7 grams |
| Dinner | Pork Tenderloin (3 ounces) Mashed Potatoes (1/2 cup) Green Beans (1 cup) | 18 grams |
| TOTAL | | 54 grams |

Which foods provide it?

There are lots to choose from. Here are some examples:

- Beef and pork; look for lean cuts such as round, sirloin, and tenderloin
- Fish and shellfish
- Turkey and chicken
- Nuts, seeds, and peanut butter
- Soy products such as tofu
- Beans
- Eggs
- Dairy such as yogurt, milk, and cheese

When looking for a protein-packed snack, grab a REV® Wrap.

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PRACTICAL TIPS

Mix It Up

It is easy to get into a habit of eating the same things week after week, but seeking out different foods exposes us to nutrients we might otherwise miss out on. Make a point to eat several different types of protein throughout the day and over the course of the week. If you notice you have tuna salad for lunch every day, consider swapping in chicken, a chef's salad, or even a peanut butter sandwich. Similarly, if you catch yourself eating chicken three nights out of the week, consider substituting with pork, fish, beans, or turkey once or twice.

Snack On It

Incorporate protein into your snacks, along with a fruit, vegetable, or whole grain, to help with fullness. Here are a few examples:

- Apple and slice of cheese
- Celery and peanut butter
- Half of a deli meat sandwich or wrap
- Mixed nuts and dried fruit
- Low-fat yogurt and frozen berries

Keep An Eye On The Size

A good goal is to keep protein portions to the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand, which is approximately 3 to 4 ounces. It may be tempting to whip up a 12-ounce steak or hefty burger, but large servings are best reserved for special occasions. Portion control helps promote a healthy weight.



Be creative

Think beyond grilled chicken and get crafty in the kitchen by making pork tostadas, Panini sandwiches with your favorite salad, turkey burgers, homemade pork dumplings, or barbeque chicken pizza.

Make it easy on yourself

On busy nights, simplify the cooking process with one-pot meals. Chili, stews and stir fry are all protein-rich options that take very little time to prepare.

Use these tips as a guide and you'll be on your way to getting the protein you need for good health.

This information is not intended as medical advice. Please consult your primary care provider or registered dietitian for more individualized recommendations.

References

1. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/Appendices.pdf>. Accessed April 14, 2014.
2. National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26. United States Department of Agriculture. <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>. Accessed April 14, 2014.