

Weighing the Pros (and Cons) of Protein

There's a lot of hype these days about protein – diets call for high protein intake, body builders seek protein shakes, and there's even protein ice cream. But is protein really that important?

To put it bluntly – yes. Protein is a very important component of every cell in the body as it is the building block of bones, muscles, cartilage, skin, and blood. Your body uses protein to build and repair tissues, and to make enzymes, hormones, and other body chemicals.

Since protein is a macronutrient, the body requires a lot of it. But too much of a good thing does exist. When significant amounts of protein are consumed with few carbohydrates, ketosis – in which the body stops burning carbs for fuel because there is an insufficient amount and starts burning its own fat – occurs. Ketones (more commonly associated with diabetes) can build up in the blood, making it more acidic, potentially leading to other serious conditions. Also note that by concentrating on protein sources, dieters may be getting too much salt, and not enough calcium, potassium, or other nutrients typically found in fruits and vegetables.

All diets are a balancing act, but your balance may be different than other individuals. The Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. However, always consult your doctor so that your medical history (such as diabetes, anemia, etc.) may be considered.



Going with the Grains (and Against the Meat)

Meat is a popular source for protein, but consider trying these alternatives.

- Cottage cheese – 13g of protein for every 4 ounces.
- Chia seeds – One oz. has 4g of high quality protein. (And omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, and antioxidants!)
- Quinoa – A single cup of quinoa is packed with around 24g of protein.
- Greek yogurt – A container can provide upward of 20g of protein.
- Beans – Pinto beans contain 15.5g of protein per cup while soybeans contain 28.5g per cup.
- Humus – One container contains 19.4g.
- Unsalted almonds – 5.9g per 22 almonds.
- About ¼ of your plate should come from high protein foods.



SOURCES: American Heart Association, WebMD, MedicalDaily.com, American Diabetes Association, Harvard Health Publications