

Frequently Asked Questions about Protein

Americans have a protein obsession, and this is not an accident. The meat and dairy industries spend billions of dollars each year promoting their protein-rich products in the media and in our schools.

1. Don't vegetarians have difficulty getting enough protein?

In the West, our problem is that we get *too much* protein – not too little. Most Americans get about five times as much protein as they need. You can get enough protein from whole wheat bread, oatmeal, beans, corn, peas, mushrooms, or broccoli – almost every food contains protein. Unless you eat a great deal of junk food, it's almost impossible to eat as many calories as we need for good health without getting enough protein.

2. How much protein do I need?

While protein is indeed necessary for the body's growth, repair, and maintenance, we actually need rather small amounts to meet these requirements. Women need about 44 grams per day (less than two ounces); men require about 56 grams (about two ounces). To put this in perspective, the average meat-eating American consumes between 100 and 150 grams of protein each day! A lacto-ovo vegetarian eats about 90 grams a day. And the average vegan, who eats no animal products, consumes about 76 grams of protein. In other words, even individuals who consume no animal products more than meet their protein requirements.

3. What is "too much" protein?

Consumption of excess protein, particularly animal protein, overworks the liver and kidneys and may lead to disease of these organs. Consumption of excess protein causes the bones to lose calcium, leading to osteoporosis, which cannot be compensated by eating calcium-rich foods. The body simply cannot absorb the calcium fast enough to make up for the loss. Decreasing protein intake is key, and the easiest way to do this is to eliminate meat, dairy products, and eggs.

4. Isn't plant protein inferior to animal protein?

Plant protein is made up of the same building blocks, called "amino acids," as animal protein. Your body uses these amino acids to make the protein it needs. As far as your body is concerned, it makes no difference whether these amino acids come from plant or animal sources.

5. Don't vegetarians have to combine certain foods to create "complete proteins"?

It is not necessary to carefully combine certain foods in order to create "complete proteins," as the outmoded complementary proteins theory once dictated. Your body will build proteins from the amino acids present in vegetables, grains, and legumes without any conscious or deliberate effort on your part.

6. Don't athletes need extra protein to meet increased demands on their bodies?

While athletes may require slightly more protein than sedentary individuals, that amount is easily met with consumption of a normal diet. Athletes need more calories to cover their increased energy output, and these calories should come from carbohydrates, not protein. Visit <http://www.organicathlete.org> for more information.

7. What are some good sources of protein?

Potatoes, beans (kidney, lima, black, pinto, garbanzo), whole wheat bread, rice, broccoli, spinach, almonds, peas, chickpeas, peanut butter, tofu, soy milk, lentils, kale, oatmeal, corn, mushrooms, tofu, tempeh, seitan, legumes, peanuts, vegetarian baked beans, quinoa, sunflower seeds, almonds, cashews, almonds, brown rice, soymilk, veggie burgers, Boca Burgers™. See chart of plant-based foods and how much protein they contain.

The American Dietetic Association: "Scientific data suggest positive relationships between a vegetarian diet and reduced risk for several chronic degenerative diseases and conditions, including obesity, coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and some types of cancer. It is the position of the ADA that vegetarian and vegan diets are healthful, are nutritionally adequate, provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases, and are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy and lactation."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<http://www.vrg.org/journal/vj2003issue4/vj2003issue4weight.htm>

<http://www.veganhealth.org/articles/protein>

<http://www.thechinastudy.com>

<http://www.pcrm.org/health/veginfo/protein.html>