

How Much Protein Do You Need?

Protein is an essential element of any diet. How much protein the average person needs, however, has been the topic of debate for years.

Medical experts contend that [most Americans get far too much daily protein](#) from large portions of meat and eggs. They say while these sources are important — and in many cases easier to prepare — there are many other protein sources, such as beans and cheese.

Even so, it is difficult to give an exact amount of protein that each person should intake on a daily basis, since that amount will depend on several factors, including:

- gender
- age
- personal goals (bodybuilder, athlete)
- health factors (pregnancy, illness)
- dietary requirements (vegan, vegetarian)
- and more

There are, however, some points to consider as you decide how to achieve the most healthy daily levels of protein for your own body and goals.

More about Protein

Before exploring the amount of protein in select foods, and how much each person may choose to consume, it is important to first touch on the importance of protein to any diet. More than just a mere muscle builder, protein works in concert with enzymes and other elements in the body to support vital functions, such as metabolism. This means that while protein may help you gain muscle, it can also help you lose fat... at the same time!

Proteins are often referred to as the “building blocks” of a healthy body. In addition to muscle, skin and hair are also made of protein. Red blood cells are renewed every 120 days (four months) through a process that is dependent on protein.

Gauging Your Perfect Personal Protein Levels

Depending on your body goals, you may choose to take in more or less daily protein. However, this, too, has been a point of contention over the years, with the medical community saying that increased protein does not necessarily translate to more muscle mass, while fitness experts swear that it most certainly does.

Whatever your stance on the topic, it is important to note that some protein sources also carry with them high levels of fat and calories. For example, most cheeses — while an acceptable protein source and healthy in small doses — are often high in calories, fat and sodium.

One method by which to gauge a healthy protein level is the idea that adults should plan to get 10 to 35 percent of their daily calories from protein. This amounts to an average of 46 protein grams for women, and 56 protein grams for men.

Protein Sources

It is not difficult for most people to get foods that contain protein, since protein is present in many foods.

Animal Protein (Meat)

A three-ounce serving of meat — including red meat, poultry, and fish — contains an average of 21 grams of protein. An eight-ounce steak contains upwards of 50 grams of protein.

Dairy Protein (Yogurt & Milk)

An eight-ounce cup of yogurt contains an average of 11 grams of protein, while an eight-ounce glass of milk contains about eight ounces of protein.

Vegetable Protein (Including Beans & Soy)

A cup of beans contains an average of 16 grams of protein. Cooking beans does not alter the protein content. Tofu, edamame, soy nuts, and meat substitutes are other healthy protein choices.

Nut Protein

All nuts contain protein, typically in higher levels per serving than other foods. Like cheese, however, many nuts are also high in calories and cholesterol.

Other Protein Sources

Other healthy sources of protein include eggs, whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, granola), some vegetables (broccoli, spinach, asparagus), [and other foods](#). ■