



FACTSHEET

PROTEINS

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What are proteins?

Protein foods are made up of chains of amino acids and proteins are involved in all body processes - think growth, repair and renewal.

The body can make some proteins itself from the different amino acids and these are known as 'non essential



amino acids'. There are some amino acids however which we can't make - we have to eat these on a daily basis and these are known as 'essential amino acids'.

The average adult needs 47-60g of protein daily. For example a chicken breast (120g) contains about 30g of protein.

Why are high protein diets so popular?

High protein diets are popular with people trying to manage their weight and this is because:

1. Protein foods are digested slowly and help to keep you feeling full longer.
2. Excess proteins cannot be stored (unlike excessive carbohydrates!) as your body simply excretes the excessive proteins.

The research does support high protein diets as being very effective for higher initial weight loss. Note though that over a longer period of time, the weight lost on high protein diet is the same as the weight lost on a higher carbohydrate type of diet plan.

Animal proteins include:

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products

Plant proteins include:

Beans, lentils, nuts and seeds. There is also some protein present in smaller amounts in cereals. Quinoa for example is relatively high in protein for a cereal food.

Some of the plant proteins are missing some of the essential amino acids which is why in the past plant proteins were also called 'incomplete proteins'. You can however combine 2 different plant proteins to receive the complete set of essential amino acids!

eg Cereal + Beans = complete protein.

(such as: Chick pea curry with brown rice or hummus with pita breads)

It was once believed that complementary proteins had to be consumed at every meal. We now know that intentional combining at each meal isn't necessary. As long as you eat a variety of plant foods, such as beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and cereals within each 24 hour period, you will meet your daily protein requirements.



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Is there a negative side to high protein diets?

Oh yes! There's never an 'easy' answer!

On the negative side:

Diets high in protein and low in fibre can cause constipation and other digestive issues.

High protein diets can be acidic and this can be detrimental to bone health.

Protein molecules contain elements such as nitrogen and sulphur and as these are broken down by the body, acids are produced. How does the body 'neutralise' these excessive acids? By taking calcium from the bones! Long term excessively high protein diets are associated with an increased loss of calcium and therefore a possible increased risk of bone loss.

High protein diets can also put a **strain** on the **kidneys** which have to work very hard in processing the additional protein.

High protein diets can make you grumpy!

High protein diets can negatively impact levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter needed for healthy brain function.

How can you balance your protein intake ?

- Eat sufficient but not excessive amounts of protein. A serving size of protein is approximately 100g-150g of meat, poultry and fish. A serving size of beans or lentils is approximately 125g - 150g cooked weight. As for a serving of nuts or seeds? About 10g or 2 tsps.
- Include a serving of animal/vegetable protein with every meal in order to balance blood sugar levels and help keep you feeling satiated.
- Limit red meat to 1-2 servings a week as it can be high in saturated fat.
- Be aware that processed meats such as ham and sausages should also be limited to 1-2 servings a week as these foods are high in both salt and fat.
- Don't forget the humble vegetable proteins - beans and lentils which are great (and cheap!) sources of both protein and fibre.