

Protein is one of the three main macronutrients your body needs to function properly, along with carbohydrates and fats. Protein is made up of smaller units called amino acids. There are 20 types of amino acids, and while our body can make 11 of them, the remaining 9 are considered “essential” and must be obtained through food.

Health Benefits

Growth and Repair: Our bodies are always growing and repairing. Protein provides the necessary building blocks, called amino acids, that help create new cells and repair existing ones. After physical activities, like sports or a workout, our muscles need to recover and get stronger. Protein helps in this process by repairing muscle tissue and promoting muscle growth. This is why athletes and people who work out regularly may need more protein than others.

Hormones and Enzymes: Protein plays a crucial role in many body functions. It helps create important chemicals like hormones and enzymes. Hormones act as messengers, carrying signals throughout the body to regulate various functions. For example, insulin is a hormone that helps control blood sugar levels. Enzymes, on the other hand, speed up chemical reactions, aiding digestion and metabolism. For instance, enzymes in your stomach help break down food into smaller components that your body can use.

Immune Health: Protein is essential for a strong and healthy immune system. It helps produce antibodies, which fight off harmful viruses and bacteria. When you get a cut or scrape, proteins in your blood help form clots to stop the bleeding. A diet rich in protein ensures that your immune system has the resources it needs to protect you from illness.

Energy: Although our bodies primarily use carbohydrates and fats for energy, protein can also be utilized when needed. During intense physical activity or when the diet is low in calories, protein can be broken down and converted into glucose, a type of sugar that our cells use for energy. This process ensures a steady energy supply, even in challenging circumstances.



Food Sources

Chicken Breast (3 ounces, cooked): 26.7 grams

Lean Beef (3 ounces, cooked): 22 grams

Turkey Breast (3 ounces, cooked): 26 grams

Cottage Cheese (1 cup): 27 grams

Greek Yogurt (1 cup): 20 grams

Eggs (1 large): 6.3 grams

Tofu (1/2 cup): 10 grams

Lentils (1 cup, cooked): 18 grams

Almonds (1 ounce): 6 grams

Peanut Butter (2 tablespoons): 8 grams

Black Beans (1 cup, cooked): 15 grams

Chickpeas (1 cup, cooked): 15 grams

Brown Rice (1 cup, cooked): 5 grams

Quinoa (1 cup, cooked): 8 grams



Note: The DV values are based on a 2000-calorie diet for healthy adults. DV values may be different for children, pregnant women, or individuals with certain medical conditions.

How Much Protein Do You Need?

While the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for women ages 19 and older is 46 grams of protein per day, midlife women may require more due to changes in metabolism, muscle mass, and hormonal shifts. To support muscle maintenance, bone health, and overall vitality, protein intake may need to increase to 1 gram per pound of ideal body weight. A higher protein intake can also help preserve muscle during weight loss. Protein-rich foods like lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy, legumes, and plant-based options are great choices, and spreading protein intake throughout the day maximizes its benefits. Adjusting protein intake with help from a dietitian can help support your goals.