

PROTEIN

In the nutrition world, how much and what types of protein one should consume is highly debated. Some say that high-quality animal meat is needed for optimal health, while others advocate for a plant-based diet. Experiment with what works for your body at this time in your life. This way you'll be able to successfully guide yourself to your appropriate protein source.



THE VEGETARIAN CULTURE

REASONS PEOPLE AVOID MEAT

Animal welfare, genetic engineering, bovine growth hormone, antibiotics, mad cow disease, environment, poor quality, taste, difficult to digest, health, weight loss, food-borne illness, toxic sludge, irradiation, spirituality

DIET FOR A SMALL PLANET

A pamphlet written by Frances Moore Lappé that became a best-selling book. Her theory on combining proteins began the 1960s health food revolution.

P.E.T.A

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is an organization that strongly advocates for animal rights and is extremely dedicated to the vegan diet.

JUNK FOOD VEGETARIAN

A vegetarian diet is not necessarily a healthy diet. People who avoid consuming animal products, but have little or no education about cooking or how to eat a balanced diet, are called junk food vegetarians. Although fries, cookies, and grilled cheese sandwiches on white bread don't contain meat, they are not nutrient-rich foods.

PCRM

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine is a non-profit organization that promotes preventative medicine, a vegan diet, and alternatives to animal research. It conducts clinical research and encourages higher standards of ethics and effectiveness in research.

VEGAN SOURCES OF PROTEIN

GRAINS	Grains are a staple in all civilizations around the world. While refined grains like white flour and white rice have had their bran and germ removed and are therefore stripped of naturally occurring vitamins, minerals, and fiber, whole grains such as rice, millet, quinoa, buckwheat, and oats still contain these nutrient-rich components. Many people are sensitive to gluten, the protein found in wheat, barley, and rye.
BEANS	Beans contain a more complete set of amino acids than other plant foods. When first introducing beans into the diet, choose fresh beans that are smaller in size such as split peas, mung, and adzuki beans for easier digestion. Digestibility can be further improved by soaking beans overnight, adding spices or vinegar, skimming off the cooking foam, pressure cooking or puréeing, and eating small portions.
SOY	Soybeans are the most difficult bean to digest. Common forms of soybeans include edamame (baby soybeans), tofu (soybean curd), and fermented soybeans in the forms of tempeh, miso, and tamari. These are the best ways to consume soy for most people, unless they have problems with fermented foods. Today's trend to consume soy in various unnatural, highly processed ways like commercial soy milk, soy meat, and soy ice cream, may not be a good idea. Also, many people are allergic to soy. Soybeans are one of the most genetically engineered crops, so it is important to choose organic whenever possible.
SOY MILK	Soy milk is not a whole food, but rather a highly processed food, unless it is homemade. It looks like milk, tastes like milk, and is often fortified with the same nutrients as commercial cow's milk. The same is true for other commercial milk substitutes such as almond or rice milk.
NUTS	Nuts are generally considered a heart-healthy fat, not a protein, and are high in fatty acids, fiber, vitamin E, and antioxidants. They are great for people who want to gain weight. Peanuts, which are actually legumes, are far higher in protein than other nuts.
PROTEIN BARS	Some protein bars are healthier than others – they vary in nutrient content and the degree of processing. Many contain refined carbohydrates, highly processed protein isolates, chemicals, sugar, and artificial sweeteners. Protein bars should not serve as meal replacements.
PROTEIN POWDER	Check for high-quality ingredients when purchasing protein powders. They are not recommended in large amounts; eat whole, natural foods as much as possible.
SEITAN	Also called “wheat-meat,” seitan is a high-protein product made from wheat gluten. Seitan is not a whole food, but is not overly-refined either – especially if it's homemade. (Because this product is pure gluten, it is not for the gluten-sensitive!)
LEAFY GREENS	Broccoli, spinach, kale, collard greens, bok choy, romaine lettuce, and watercress all contain varying amounts of protein. Leafy greens are the one food high associated with longevity, because they contain major sources of magnesium, iron, and calcium. They are also with a rich source of quercetin, a bioflavonoid with antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and cancer fighting properties. Green leafy vegetables are dense with easily assimilated amino acids as well as other life-extending nutrients.
SEEDS	High in nutrients and lower in caloric content than nuts, seeds provide anti-inflammatory and cardiovascular benefits. Seeds contain vitamin E, fiber, and are some of the few plant-based sources of omega-3's. Some of the healthiest seeds include chia, flax, hemp, pumpkin, sesame, and sunflower.

THE NON-VEGETARIAN CULTURE

HISTORY	For centuries, many cultures have been eating animal protein – Alaskan Natives, Native Americans, Africans, Europeans, Chinese, and Tibetans.
PERSONAL CHOICE	Respect your body's needs. Many bodies need animal protein. Determine the amount your body needs by paying attention to how you feel; it may be more or less than what you are consuming now. Some people feel more grounded, strong-minded, and focused by including meat or other animal products in their diets.
PROBLEMS	Potential concerns surrounding the manufacture and consumption of animal products include antibiotics, factory farming, animal cruelty, cloning, irradiation, toxic sludge, E. coli bacteria, mad cow disease, genetic engineering, bovine growth hormone, cancer, heart disease, obesity, and constipation.
QUALITY	If you choose to consume animal protein, it is important to eat high-quality, organic, free-range, grass-fed forms. The health of the animal affects the health of the consumer.
QUANTITY	Generally, animal protein portions should be limited to the size of your palm or smaller.
DIGESTION	To help digest animal protein, eat plenty of vegetables with your meal.
ENERGY TYPE	Many scientific researchers believe a protein is a protein is a protein, whether it is from dry beans, chicken, or a hamburger. But others find that each protein source affects us differently on an energetic level. Pay closer attention to see if you notice the difference. (Suggested reading: <i>Energetics of Food</i> by Steve Gagné.)



ANIMAL PROTEIN SOURCES

MEAT

Commonly eaten meat includes chicken, turkey, duck, lamb, beef, buffalo, ostrich, and game. Try different types to discover what works best with your body.

EGG

Eggs are a quick, practical, and inexpensive protein source. When eating eggs, try to have one, not two or three. Eat the whole egg to get the total energy of the egg, as opposed to just the egg white.

FISH

Fish are a lean, healthy source of protein and the oily kinds (salmon, tuna, sardines, etc.) contain heart and brain-healthy omega-3's. Fish farming is a huge industry, and nearly 85% of the world's fisheries are fished to capacity or overfished. Beware of mercury poisoning, genetic engineering, and added chemicals. Eating fish that are lower on the food chain (like sardines) helps to decrease the risk of mercury and other toxins found in its flesh. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program helps consumers make choices by recommending sustainable sources.

DAIRY

Many people have negative reactions to cow's milk. Try other dairy foods like buttermilk, yogurt, butter, or ghee. Or try other animal species like goat and sheep. Buy organic to avoid bovine growth hormone and antibiotics. Unpasteurized, raw milk is also an option.

BEEES

Protein from bee pollen and royal jelly digests easily and has many other nutrients. It's a good option for vegetarians who want to avoid consuming animal flesh.

