



EatWell

Every Body Needs Protein

Protein seems to be the buzz word and very much in fashion at the moment. Food packaging and diet advice used to promote low-fat, low-calorie or low-salt but suddenly, it's all about high protein! But why so much hype?

Let's talk about one of the most fundamental building blocks of life—protein.

Every Body Needs Protein—and I really mean that literally. Every cell in your body depends on protein. It's not just for bodybuilders in the gym, athletes on the track or injured people trying to speed up healing. Whether you're young or old, active or sedentary, your body needs protein every single day to function, to grow, to repair damage, to strengthen the immune system, to support hormone balance and for enzyme production. Basically, we need protein to survive and thrive.

So, let's start with the basics.

Protein is a macronutrient - along with carbohydrates and fats, our bodies require it in large amounts. But while carbs and fats are mainly used for energy, protein is primarily about structure and function.

When you eat protein—say from eggs, beans, legumes, fish, meat or supplements—your digestive system breaks it down into individual amino acids. These amino acids then travel through your bloodstream to wherever they're needed.

Think of amino acids like letters of the alphabet. We can arrange letters in countless ways to make words and sentences. In the same way, our bodies arrange amino acids into different proteins to do specific jobs.

Most amino acids can be made in the body by breaking down and reforming other proteins. But nine of the amino acids are considered “essential”—meaning we must get them from our diets, because our bodies can’t produce them.

The protein we’ve eaten in the last few hours is, as we speak, being used to make a whole range of substances that are essential for us to live and work. These include:

- Structural proteins - the walls, floors and rooves that make most of the physical body - muscle, skin, hair, nails, blood vessels and the connective tissues that hold us together and help us to look good inside and outside. Keep in mind that when we damage any of these, for example scratching our skin, we don’t fix the damaged cells, instead we grow new ones to replace them. Protein is essential for growth and repair.
- Then we have Enzymes the work crew that speed up the chemistry of life - helping us to digest food, create the energy we need to run on, detox harmful substances, build DNA, and much more.
- Where would we be without Hormones the project managers that control our growth and development, regulate our mood and stress levels, balance our blood sugar levels while also coordinating our sleep and natural daily rhythms. Protein is very important for us to maintain a healthy metabolism.
- What would we do without Transport proteins like haemoglobin, found in red blood cells, which carry essential life-giving oxygen throughout the body to every cell that needs it? The simple answer is we wouldn’t or couldn’t do anything, at all without these vital proteins.
- And how would we survive without Antibodies the security team that identify harmful invaders like viruses and bacteria protect us from illness. Well, without a strong immune system, we wouldn’t survive for long. These antibodies are working round the clock, quietly in the background to keep us from getting sick, only going into all-out battle-mode when we get a serious wound or infection.

Without enough protein, these systems don’t work properly—and over time, our body can start to break down its own muscle tissue to meet its needs.

One really important note: unlike carbohydrates and fats, your body can’t store protein for later use. That’s why it’s important to eat enough protein daily, even several times a day - not just once in a while.

So where can we get protein?

Protein comes from both wholefoods, that is animal and plant sources and also supplements.

Let’s look at each:

Animal sources (these can be called complete proteins as they contain all of the nine essential amino acids that we mentioned earlier). These include:

- Meat: chicken, beef, pork, lamb
- Fish and seafood: salmon, tuna, shellfish
- Dairy: milk, yogurt, cheese
- Eggs

Then we have Plant sources (some of these are incomplete as they don't each contain the essential amino acids, but they can be combined in our meals to make sure we get all the essentials). We can get our protein from plants such as:

- Legumes: beans, lentils, chickpeas
- Nuts and seeds: like peanuts, almonds, chia seeds, sunflower seeds
- Soy products: tofu, tempeh, edamame (complete proteins)
- Whole grains: quinoa, oats, brown rice

A common myth is that plant-based diets can't provide enough protein. They can—it just requires variety. For example, rice and beans together give you a full amino acid profile.

What about protein powders and supplements?

In many cases, you can meet your protein needs from whole foods. But supplements can be helpful if:

- You have high protein requirements (athletes, bodybuilders, pregnant women, people recovering from illness)
- You have limited time to prepare meals. Cooking up an entire meal and sitting down to eat three or four times a day can be very time-consuming, while mixing up a shake that you can take with you is very convenient.
- You follow a diet that restricts certain food groups. If you are plant-based, have food intolerances, or are just a fussy eater, supplements can really help in getting all the protein you need.

Common supplements include whey protein (which are fast-digesting and made from the protein found in milk – ideal after exercise or in the morning), casein (which also comes from milk but is slow-digesting), and increasingly popular plant-based powders from pea, soy, or hemp.

The key is to use them as a supplement, to boost our diets, and health not a replacement for nutrient-rich wholefood meals.

So now we know how important protein is, and where to get it from. But how much do we need?

The debate on this continues as it really depends on our activity levels and our goals.

The official Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is about 0.8 g per kg of body weight per day for healthy, sedentary adults. So, this suggests that a 9 – stone, or 57Kg adult with an inactive lifestyle would need 45 grams per day, while a 12 – stone, 76Kg inactive adult should eat 61grams of protein per day.

However, this recommended allowance is considered the amount needed to prevent deficiency and many experts agree that eating more protein can support a higher level of health.

Here are some general guidelines for optimal health, telling us how many grams of protein we need, for each kilo of our body weight to eat each day

Purpose / Population	Recommended Range (g/kg/day)
For inactive adults to prevent protein deficiency	0.8
For inactive adults to promote optimal general health	1.0–1.2
For adults to preserve muscle tissue and strength	1.2–2.0
Endurance athletes like runners & cyclists etc..	1.2–1.4
When Strength training/bodybuilding	1.6–1.8, up to 2.0 during weight loss
Muscle gain / very active athletes	1.6–2.2 (occasionally up to 2.7)

As with any diet or health goal, it is best to consult a wellbeing professional for advice specific to your needs and try to avoid extremes of any kind. Remember that it can take time and some trial and error to find the balance that suits your body best.

So, that's the basics of one of our most essential nutrients and to sum it up: Protein is essential—not just for building muscle, but for keeping your body running, repairing itself, and defending against illness. Aim to include a variety of protein sources in your daily diet and consider supplements when needed to meet your goals.

Keep in mind that your body is constantly working, repairing, and rebuilding at every stage of life. Give it the building blocks it needs, and it should reward you with energy, strength, and resilience.

Thank you for listening and remember to Eat Well for greater health.