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How Much Protein Do I Need?

People who attempt to restrict their food intake commonly eat inadequate protein. Most nutritionists recommend that we eat about 60% of our calories as carbohydrate, 25-30% as fat, and 10-15% as protein. For most people, this means eating the amount of protein in at least two 3 oz. servings of protein-rich foods and 2 or 3 cups of milk or yogurt per day.

You can most accurately estimate your protein needs based on your appropriate body weight. Assuming that you are a healthy, active person, multiply your weight in pounds by 0.5 to 0.7 grams of protein per pound. This allows slightly more than the current recommendation of 0.4 grams protein per pound for the “average” person. Active people have slightly higher protein needs than the “average person” especially if you are building muscle, rebuilding your body or restricting your calories and burning protein for energy.

_____ Healthy body weight X 0.5-0.7 grams protein per pound = _____ to _____ grams per day.
(The higher number is appropriate if you are building muscle, eating primarily vegetarian foods, or restricting calories.)

If you eat primarily vegetarian sources of protein, you should target the higher amount of protein to be certain of getting enough amino acids, the building blocks of protein. All animal food offer all of the amino acids. If you prefer to abstain from all animal protein you will need a wide *variety* of plant proteins.

To determine your approximate protein intake, write down everything you eat on a typical day. Use the following guidelines plus food labels to calculate the grams of protein in each food according to serving size. For greater accuracy you can measure the portion sizes on the days you assess.

PROTEIN CONTENT OF SOME COMMONLY EATEN FOODS

Meat, fish, and animal proteins:

| | |
|---|-------|
| Poultry, fish, beef, 4 oz cooked (6 oz raw) | 32 |
| Tuna, 6 oz can | 40 |
| Egg, 1 large | 6 |
| Egg white, 1 | 3 |
| Lean Cuisine dinners | 20-28 |

Beans, nuts, vegetarian proteins:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Kidney beans, ½ cup | 9 |
| Garbanzo beans, ½ cup | 6 |
| Lentil soup, Progresso, 10.5 oz can | 10 |
| Tofu, ¼ cake (4 oz) | 9 |
| Peanut butter, 2 Tbs. | 9 |
| Bean Burrito, Taco Bell | 13 |

Dairy Products

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Milk, non-fat fortified, 8 oz. | 10 |
| Yogurt, Dannon non-fat, 8 oz | 12 |
| Cottage cheese, ½ cup | 13 |
| Mozarella cheese, 1 oz. | 8 |
| American cheese, 1 slice, 2/3 oz. | 3 |
| Cheese pizza, 1 slice | 15 |
| Frozen yogurt, ½ cup | 4 |

(These food have complete proteins)

Breads, cereals, grains

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Pita bread, 1.5 oz | 6 |
| Bread, 1 slice | 4 |
| Bagel, mini | 6 |
| Shredded Wheat, 2/3 cup | 3 |
| Raisin Bran, 2/3 cup | 3 |
| All-Bran, 1/3 cup | 4 |
| Oatmeal, 1/3 cup uncooked | 6 |
| Rice, 1 cup cooked | 3 |
| Spaghetti, 1 cup cooked | 8 |
| Noodles, 1 cup cooked | 8 |
| Pretzel, Dutch | 2 |
| Rice cake, 1 | 1 |

Vegetables

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Lettuce, ¼ head | 1 |
| Carrots, 1 large | 1 |
| Broccoli, 1 cup | 5 |
| Corn, ½ cup | 2 |
| Potato, large | 4 |

Fruits

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Apple, medium | <1 |
| Banana, medium | 1 |
| Orange, medium | 1 |

(Adapted from Nancy Clark, RD, SportsMedicine, Brookline, MA.)