

How Much Protein?

Non-animal foods can easily provide us with the necessary protein. Despite the claims of the meat and dairy industries, only 2.5 to 10 percent of the total calories consumed by the average human being needs to be in the form of protein. The rule of thumb used by the National Academy of Sciences food and Nutrition Board is .57 grams of protein for every kilogram (2.2 lbs) of body weight. People under special circumstances (such as pregnant women) are advised to get a little more. Vegans should not worry about getting enough protein; if you eat a reasonably varied diet and ingest sufficient calories, you will undoubtedly get enough protein.

Eating too much protein can result in osteoporosis and kidney stones. Meat and dairy products raise the acid level in human blood, causing calcium to be excreted from the bones to restore the body's natural pH balance. This calcium depletion results in osteoporosis, or weakening of the bones. The excreted calcium ends up in the kidneys, where it often forms painful stones. Kidney disease is far more common in meat-eaters than in vegans, and excessive protein consumption has also been linked to cancer of the colon, breast, prostate, and pancreas. By replacing animal protein with vegetable protein, you can improve your health while enjoying a wide variety of delicious foods.

While just about every vegetarian food contains some protein, the soybean deserves special mention, for it contains all eight essential amino acids and surpasses all other food plants in the amount of protein it can deliver to the human system. In this regard it is nearly equal to meat. The human body uses about 70 percent of the protein found in meat and 60 to 65 percent of that found in soybeans. The many different and delicious soy products available in health and grocery stores suggest that the soy bean, in its many forms, can accommodate a wide range of tastes.

Other rich sources of non-animal protein include legumes, nuts, seeds, food yeasts and freshwater algae and Quinoa. Although food yeasts ("nutritional yeast") do not lend them to forming the center of one's diet, they are extremely nutritious additions to most menus (in soups, gravies, breads, casseroles, and dips). Most yeast is 50 percent protein while most meats are only 25 percent.

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