The Power of Protein: More Than Muscle Building

Why all the hype about protein lately?

Most people think of protein as slabs of meat that athletes, body builders and strength trainers down regularly to build muscle. Recent research has shown dietary protein has a much broader list of benefits—from weight loss, satiety and healthy aging to blood sugar control and diabetes management. Many experts, in fact, think our consumption of this important nutrient should be higher than the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA), which is based on the minimum needed to replace daily losses.

Protein has truly become the Nutrient of the Decade. Continue reading to find out more about protein, separate the truth from the hype, figure out how much is needed and learn what foods are good sources.

What exactly IS protein?

Protein is an essential macronutrient, along with fat and carbohydrate, that our bodies need each day. It is part of every cell, tissue and organ in our bodies. It is made up of 20 amino acids, or building blocks. Nine of these amino acids are considered essential—we need to get them from our diets because our bodies cannot make them.

We need amino acids from the protein in the foods we eat to build and maintain bones, muscles and skin. Other important functions of protein include making enzymes, hormones and antibodies; maintaining fluid, electrolytes and acid-base balance; and providing energy and glucose (sugar) to our bodies.

If we don’t get enough protein, and specifically enough of the 9 essential amino acids, we can become protein deficient, causing problems in all of these areas. In addition, because the body doesn’t have a way to store protein as it does fat and carbohydrate, we need to consume adequate protein every day.
Healthy Foods Word Search Puzzle

Find all of the words listed below in the word search. **Highlight** the foods that are in the **protein group** and **circle** the foods that are not in the protein food group.

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B C J B K M J H C T W M C S S S W S Q T
L D R M O A R H Y O A B D A N E A U N R
U S F A S X E H M T Q L G R O L T Y T U
E D E Z N E M A E E C W X R M P E X W G
B S C A S B T R T D E H H O E P R P O O
E Z I E W O E J F O A S K T L A M S J Y
R W R I E V M R B F E K S S K V E I T L
R K N S R P B A R G O C Q D D B L B T A
I Y W I L K N A N I K L Y X N I O G Z E
S C R F N C R A Z P B S T Z E U M O B T
T D B A S O W H O L E G R A I N S L F A
R E S D K U Y W M C O L L E T T Z Z N A O
S P I N A C H H Z F G C X T C G N Z Q K
X K R M M R Z K I K G E M T N G Q B T K
Z T J I Y W I Y E K G I M C F N F J F D
W B M Q U M A U Z G T N L U L L A I J I
R Q V J Q S X I S O E F L H V S X D P V
M U U Z D B P Z G P Q S W E H S A C E Y
W B L Q L S R V O N G I T H C I A Q V H
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- ALMONDS
- BANANAS
- BROWN RICE
- CASHEWS
- CRANBERRIES
- LEMONS
- ORANGES
- TOMATOES
- WATERMELON
- YOGURT

- APPLES
- BLUEBERRIES
- CARROTS
- CHEESE
- EGGS
- OATMEAL
- SPINACH
- WATER
- WHOLE GRAINS