

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Protein - What Do You Need?

You can certainly find a range of recommendations in the popular press these days on how much protein you should be getting. And at least a hundred times more ideas about how should get that protein – Meat! Beans! Whey protein! Dairy! No Dairy! Soy! Tempeh or tofu or crumbles! Seitan! Mushrooms! Should it be raw, or cooked? Organic or natural, or just plain regular? Let's start with some basics here.

We all need to eat some protein. Protein is made of amino acids and we simply can NOT produce some of the amino acids we need. We have to get them from our food. We have to make our own proteins from the amino acids we eat. Sure, protein makes muscle, but proteins are also the chemical form of enzymes, some hormones, and the walls of every cell in our body from our brains to our bones to our toes.

Surprisingly, when doctors and dietitians calculate how much protein a person needs, it mostly depends on our weight! The bigger our body, the more protein we need to keep it going. But, the younger we are the more efficiently our bodies use the protein that we eat. And as we age we become less and less efficient. So a child who is growing rapidly will be very efficient at using the protein in their meals. An elderly grandmother usually needs more protein per pound of weight than her grandchild, even if that grandchild is a weight-lifting teenager!

There are other things that will influence how much protein we need. Someone who is recovering from surgery will need more. Someone who is ill or recovering from a severe illness, or who lives with a chronic illness probably needs more. Someone recovering from a bad burn needs more than anyone else.

On the whole however there are some numbers we can use to get an estimate of how much protein we need to maintain a healthy body. Start with your weight. For children and adults to middle age, multiply that number by 0.36, or if you want to simplify it, multiply by 0.4. The result is how many grams of protein you should get in a day. So a person who weighs 150 pounds would need $150 \times .36$ equals 54 grams of protein.

An elderly person should use 0.55 to multiply. For them, at 150 pounds times .55 is 83g of protein in a day. These are rough estimates of what that body needs to keep all its protein needs satisfied. For other medical conditions or for more precise needs you should always talk to your doctor or dietitian.

The next question is 'How should I get my protein?' Probably the most important part of the answer is 'Not all at once.' Spreading our protein intake out across the whole day is going to be much more helpful for our bodies. That would mean the younger 150 pound person should try to get about 20g to 25g of protein for breakfast and lunch, then finish off the rest in the evening meal. So, no huge steaks for dinner!

Next, what kind of protein do we need? A mixture is better. Plant proteins are excellent choices, partly because they don't come with the saturated fat that animal proteins often have. So consider, ½ cup of cooked beans has about 7g of protein, as does an egg. Skim milk has 8g in an 8 oz glass, and plain, fat-free Greek yogurt has about 18g in a 6 oz cup. A 3 oz beef burger has 20 to 24g, and a veggie burger has 11 to 15g. High-protein cereals might have up to 13g in a cupful, but you need to read the label. It's not that difficult to get what you need. Lots of foods have added protein these days, so keep track for a day or two to see how your diet stacks up. Then decide if you need more or not.

If you have kidney problems, or a family history of them, do not overdose on protein. Too much puts an extra load on the kidneys that you want to avoid.

This curried chicken salad will make a good lunch as the weather turns warmer.

Curried Chicken Salad

2 cups chopped cooked chicken	¾ cup dried cranberries
½ cup minced celery	¼ cup chopped pecans
2 Tbsp thinly sliced green onions	¾ cup mayonnaise or salad dressing
2 tsp lime juice	¾ tsp curry powder

Combine chicken, cranberries, celery, pecans and onions in large bowl and mix. In small bowl mix mayonnaise, lime juice and curry powder. Stir into chicken mixture. Cover and chill until serving time. Serve over lettuce or slaw mix. Serves 6.

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