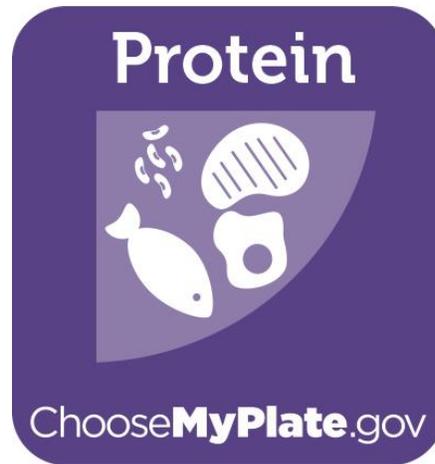
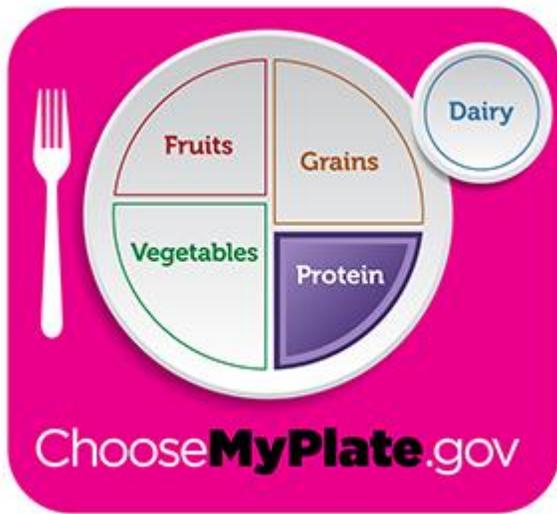


MyPlate-protein



We all recognize that protein is an important macronutrient needed for growth, a strong immune system and is a boon when it comes to blood sugar and weight management. It's used liberally in powder form to build muscle or curb appetite and seems to be glorified in the news regularly. But too much of a good thing is well, not good. Let's take a closer look at protein- the good, the bad and the ugly. This is the 4th article in our series to support the My Plate Start Simple Campaign. ¹

For starters, protein needs vary across the lifespan and are one of the few nutrients that are based on weight versus the RDA. You typically won't see a percent Daily Value on a food label for protein as everyone's needs are different. Protein requirements are higher in early life (infants, children) and go down by adulthood with the exception of pregnancy. In addition, some people may require more protein in times of physiologic stress and illness or post-op to help heal wounds. ²

Extreme athletes (triathletes, marathon runners and body builders) require more protein per kilogram as well, though research does not show benefit of intakes above 2.0 grams per kg. Most athletes can repair muscle tissue after exercise with 1.2-1.8 grams of protein per kg.³

Recent research advises an increase in the RDA for adults over the age of 70 to prevent muscle loss. It's estimated that adults lose .5-1% of muscle mass per year after the age of 50. Older adults have less protein synthesis than younger adults. The current RDA is .8 grams per kg, but some researchers advise 1.0-1.3 grams of protein per kg for those over 70. ⁴

Adequate dietary protein need not come only from animals. More and more studies recommend that we eat more plants and less cow, not only for our health, but the health of the planet. A recent study published in *Lancet* suggests that consuming less animal protein reduces water and land use, methane gas production, and climate change emissions. ⁵ Animal-based diets may be suggested for weight loss (i.e. Atkin's, Paleo or keto diet), but may be particularly troublesome long term. A recent Finnish study noted higher mortality rates with the use of high protein diets long term, especially in those with type 2 diabetes. The study advises reducing red meat and processed meat to lower risk for cardiovascular disease and certain cancers. ⁶ This is good advice for everyone.

The previous belief that vegetarian sources of protein need to be combined to create a "complete protein" and meet essential amino acid needs is out of date. Our bodies store amino acids and

assimilate them as needed to make various proteins. While it won't hurt us to combine beans with rice or peanut butter with whole wheat bread, proteins are constantly being broken down and reassembled, so foods no longer need to be combined at meals. ⁷

Here are some easy ways to obtain adequate protein while protecting your heart, colon, and the environment:

1. Swap ground beef for ground turkey. Choose products that are 90% lean or higher
2. Use less meat in chili or stew and double the beans and vegetables
3. Tried grilled portobello mushrooms or veggie burgers this season
4. Include lentils or dried beans as your protein source in place of meat
5. Choose low-fat dairy when possible and enjoy moderate servings of dairy products
6. Use nut butter or hummus for sandwiches in place of lunch meat

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Submitted by Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD

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