- Proteins—nutrition



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How much protein do you need?

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Now we know why our bodies need protein, it's time to find out how much. Here's how to do your own calculations...



Protein is an important nutrient. It helps with building and maintaining muscle, provides energy, and keeps your cells working as they should be. Eating plenty of protein also helps keep you full and may even help to avoid weight gain. The question is, how do you know if you're getting enough?

According to the British Nutrition Foundation, an adult needs 0.75g of protein per kg of bodyweight a day. This translates to a recommended daily allowance (RDA) of about 56g a day for a 75kg man and 45g a day for a 60kg woman.

Although it's helpful to have a figure to aim for, this RDA doesn't take into account many of the factors that change how much protein your body needs.

What influences how much protein you need?

The RDA of protein is based on the minimum amount of protein an average person needs to avoid losing lean body mass (your bodyweight minus your body fat). Some experts prefer to use the acceptable macronutrient distribution range (AMDR) to calculate protein needs instead. As the AMDR recommends 10-35 per cent of your calories come from protein, it's more tailored to your gender, size and activity level, all of which have an impact your protein requirements.

Although men and women need slightly different amounts of protein, data is conflicting on what the specific values should be for each gender and calculations tend to be based on weight.

Weighing more doesn't always mean you need more protein, however – if you have a BMI of 30 or higher, it's a good idea to calculate your protein requirements based on your fat-free mass or muscle mass. If you live a more sedentary lifestyle, you'll also need less protein than someone who is more active.

As you get older, it becomes harder to maintain your muscle even if you're active. On average, muscle mass decreases between 3-8 per cent every 10 years after age 30 and even faster after age 60 (read more about this on page 109). The good news is that eating more protein can help

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30 DAYS TO Increase Your Protein

counteract some of this muscle loss. This means older people tend to have higher protein requirements and may benefit from eating more than the recommended amount of protein.

If your body is working harder than normal, you may also need to up your protein intake. This may be because you're active and exercise a lot, or it may be that you're fighting off an illness.

What about if I want to put on muscle?

The recommended 0.8g of protein per kg of bodyweight is the minimum amount to avoid losing muscle. If you're actively trying to gain muscle and you're doing resistance training or using weights regularly, you may want to aim for more like 1.2-2g of protein per kg of bodyweight a day.

If you're thinking of upping your protein intake to gain muscle, it's most important to do it for the first 12 weeks of your new training regime. During this time, your muscle will need more protein to repair the damage that happens after your workouts.

After the first few weeks, your body will get used to the new level of activity and you can cut down your daily protein to more like 1.2g per kg of bodyweight.

What if I want to lose weight?

Protein can be a really useful weight loss tool as it helps you feel fuller for longer, making you less inclined to snack or overeat at your next meal. It's also important for building and maintaining muscle, which in turn increases your metabolic rate and helps you to burn more calories when at rest.

If you're trying to lose weight, research suggests that eating between 1.2-1.6g per kg (of bodyweight) of lean protein a day can help. For the best effects, try to include between 25-30g of protein in each meal.

Spreading your protein throughout the day

For your body to process protein effectively and experience all its benefits, it's best to divide your protein intake across the whole day.

Around 20-30g of protein is the ideal amount for one meal. Any more than this, and the body may struggle to absorb it and use it properly. You can also include some high-protein snacks between meals if you are feeling hungry.

Spreading your protein evenly throughout the day also helps stimulate muscle protein synthesis over a longer period of time.



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PROTEIN REQUIREMENTS QUICK GUIDE

For specific advice on how much protein you need, it's always best to speak to a dietician. They'll be able to provide a personalised plan based on your unique situation and goals.

Sedentary adult	**0.75g a day** per kg of bodyweight
Active adult	**1.2-2g a day** per kg of bodyweight
Older adult	**1.2-2g a day** per kg of bodyweight
Strength athlete	**1.2-2g a day** per kg of bodyweight



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