- Proteins—nutrition

How to ensure your diet packs a protein punch

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Protein isn't just for building muscle – it plays a vital role in keeping you strong, supporting your immune system and helping you maintain energy to live life to the fullest well into your later years.



Yet many older adults fall short of their daily protein needs. The good news? You don't need to overhaul your entire diet to fix that. With a few smart habits and the right food choices, staying on track can be simpler than you think.

Here's how to make sure you're getting the protein your body needs every day.

What are the health benefits of protein, especially for older adults?

"Protein is essential for growth, repair and maintenance [within the body], and has several important functions," explains Dr Sammie Gill, a specialist gastroenterology dietitian at Symprove UK. "For example, it plays a key role in the structure and support of body tissues and organs. Protein also forms the basis of hormones, enzymes and antibodies of the immune system.

"In addition, higher protein intakes have been linked with higher bone mineral density and a slower rate of bone loss, muscle mass, and strength in older adults."

Good sources of protein include lean meats like beef, chicken and turkey, as well as fish, eggs, dairy products and plant-based options like beans, lentils, tofu, and nuts and seeds.

What is the recommended daily intake of protein for adults?

"In the UK, adults require 0.75g of protein per kg of body weight daily [according to Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI)]," says Dr Gill. "You can meet protein requirements with animal proteins and plantbased proteins, or plant-based proteins alone."

For example, a 70kg person would need approximately 52.5g of protein daily, but this recommendation can vary based on factors like age, activity level and overall health.

"Protein becomes more important as you get older with age-related changes in protein digestion, protein absorption, and protein metabolism," says Dr Gill. "Research suggests that older people (65+) should consume 1-1.2g of protein per kg of body weight daily to support muscle mass and function." 2.

Dr Gill's tips on how to eat more protein

1. Spread your protein throughout the day "For example, think Greek yoghurt for breakfast, eggs at lunch and beans at dinner."

Include protein-containing snacks during the day between meals

"For example, a handful of almonds, wholegrain crackers with peanut butter, or a slice of cheese with some grapes." 3. Consume more high-protein drinks "Consider higher protein drinks such as cow's milk, unsweetened soya milk, or kefir." 4.

Include items that don't require much prep time

"For example, cans of legumes (such as chickpeas or lentils) and tinned or frozen fish can be great options."

5. Focus on whole foods rather than protein bars

"I wouldn't recommend protein bars. They often contain a long list of unnecessary ingredients including sugars, sweeteners, emulsifiers, thickeners, sodium and other additives. Focus on whole foods instead."