



DAY 04 - PROTEIN CHALLENGE

LIVE THE FLOURISHING LIFE: FLOURISHING FITNESS

Protein powders, protein shakes and protein bars are all the rage in the fitness world. But what is protein, and is it really important for your health?

PROTEIN & HEALTH

Protein is an essential macronutrient found in every cell in your body. It plays a role in carrying oxygen into your blood and powering many of the chemical processes that make your body work. As one of the basic building blocks of life, proteins make up the structure of your cells and help to repair them and make new ones. They are beneficial for your immune system and the regulation of your hormones. Alongside calcium and vitamin D, they are an essential factor in the health of your bones—studies relating high protein levels to reduced calcium have proven not to be viable in the long term, and proteins build hormones that promote bone health. Protein may also speed up healing after an injury and—particularly important in fitness—recovery after exercise. Some have suggested that high protein intake can damage your kidneys—while this may be true for those with diagnosed kidney disease, there is little evidence for it in healthy people.

PROTEIN & WEIGHT

Most people are consuming enough protein for their bodies to perform these essential functions—however, if you are over 50, you might not be. Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that a high-protein diet can be beneficial. Concerning weight loss and maintenance, a high-protein diet has produced positive results in some studies. These outcomes appear to be the result of protein increasing feelings of fullness and reducing appetite, leading to lesser overall caloric intake. There is also evidence that higher levels of protein can boost the metabolism. However, the results of these weight-loss studies are disputed. They are mostly based on high-protein, low-carb diets, so the weight loss could be attributed to the loss of water weight that occurs when carbohydrates are restricted. High-protein diets are also often high in fat and red meat—both of which can be harmful—so try to get most of your protein from other sources such as poultry, seafood, dairy, soy, nuts, legumes and beans. Like any diet, a high-protein diet may be hard to sustain and some weight will most

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likely come back if you return to a regular diet. It is also important that you don't increase your overall caloric intake, as this will still lead you to gain fat.

PROTEIN & MUSCLE

Probably the most common reason that people consume extra protein is to build muscle. Proteins certainly do play an important role in increasing muscle mass and strength and retaining lean muscle. However, it is important to note that protein above the recommended amount has little to no benefit without a corresponding increase in muscle-building activity—if you're not planning to exercise frequently, more than the average amount of protein won't do you much good. For athletes, both protein and carbohydrates are recommended for optimum nutrition and performance. Higher protein levels are often prescribed for strength athletes in particular, but individual advice should be sought through a sports nutritionist.

GETTING THE RIGHT PROTEIN

In Australia, it is recommended that men between 19 and 30 get 0.84 grams per kilogram of their body weight each day, and women of the same age get 0.75 grams per kilogram. If you are over 70, those numbers increase to 1.07 and 0.94 grams respectively. Another way of calculating this is aiming for 10-25% of your caloric intake to come from protein. For adults, this will look like 5-6 servings of protein-rich foods per day, with about half coming from dairy or dairy alternatives, preferably reduced-fat. Some great serving options include:

- For breakfast, have a whole cup of milk with your cereal or two eggs (1 serve)
- For lunch, try a salad with 80g cooked poultry and a cup of cooked beans or legumes (2 serves)
- For a snack, have your fruit with 200g yoghurt or 120g ricotta cheese (1 serve)
- For dinner, try a burger with 80g of lean meat or 170g tofu and 2 slices of cheese (2 serves)