

Proteins

What is Protein?

Protein is a part of every cell in our body. Proteins not only help to build and repair tissues like skin, muscles, bones and organs, they also help regulate body processes. For example, as enzymes and hormones, they make various chemical reactions happen. As antibodies, they protect you from disease-carrying bacteria and viruses.

Proteins are made up of amino acids. Amino acids are building blocks that build, repair and maintain our body's tissues. There are two main categories of amino acids in the body:

- **Essential Amino Acids** – cannot be made by the body and, therefore, must be obtained through our diets.
- **Non-Essential Amino Acids** – can be made by the body.

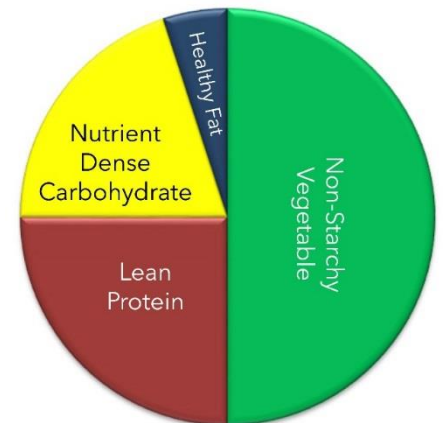
Proteins can also supply us with energy like carbohydrates and fats can. When you consume more protein than you need, it is broken down and stored as fat, not as a reserve supply of protein. Since we can't store protein for later use, we must eat proteins (with a variety of amino acids) regularly.

Choosing Proteins

Since different protein-rich foods contain different amino acids, it's important to eat a variety of protein-rich foods to ensure that your body is getting all the different amino acids it needs to function optimally. **Choose high quality proteins as often as possible** such as grass-fed, pasture-raised meats that are chemical, antibiotic and hormone free, and wild-caught, low toxin seafood. Plant-based proteins like beans and lentils are also a great nutrient dense choice. Nuts, seeds, grains and some vegetables also have a little protein.

High Quality Proteins

- Wild salmon, sardines, shrimp, scallops, clams, oysters, and other fish
- Wild game meats
- Pasture-raised poultry and eggs
- Lean cuts of grass-fed beef and pasture-raised pork
- Grass-fed, organic dairy (plain Greek yogurt, cottage cheese)
- Organic, non-GMO whole soy foods (tempeh, tofu, edamame)
- Beans and lentils



Key Points and Recommendations

- **Include a variety of high quality proteins throughout the day.**
- **Limit highly processed meats** like poor quality bacon, sausage and deli meat.
- When trying to figure out how much protein to incorporate into your meals, the plate template above is a good place to start. Speak with a registered dietitian nutritionist for individual recommendations.