

# Tap Into Protein Power

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Protein is an essential nutrient found in many foods. Protein breaks down into amino acids and the body uses them to make muscles, tendons, organs, enzymes, hormones and other molecules that serve important functions. Without protein, our bodies couldn't function.



## We can get protein from animal and plant sources.

Animal sources include meat (beef, lamb, pork, etc.), poultry, eggs and dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt. Plant protein comes from beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and, to a lesser extent, vegetables and whole grains.

**We need 20 amino acids** — 9 of them must come from diet because the body can't make them. Animal and plant-based proteins such as soy and quinoa contain all 9. Most beans, nuts, seeds and whole grains lack 1 or more essential amino acids, but not the same ones. By eating a variety of these foods, you'll get what your body needs, even if you choose not to eat animal products.

**How much protein do you need?** The answer depends on your age, gender, activity level and current health. Guidelines suggest a range of 10% to 35% of daily calories. On average, we consume about 16% of total daily calories from protein.



## Here's the protein content in some common foods:

FOOD	SERVING SIZE	PROTEIN CONTENT (G)
Chicken	3 oz.	28
Fish	3 oz.	20-22
Greek yogurt	1 cup	22
Edamame (green soy beans)	1 cup	18
Lentils	1 cup	18
Chickpeas	1 cup	14
Quinoa	1 cup	8
Almonds	1 oz.	6