

Join us for the Fitwize

Nutrition Session

Friday, May 17 • 4 to 5 PM!



Our nutrition session this month will focus on what foods contain protein and why we need it in our diet every day!

The Benefits of More Dietary Protein

By Stephanie Mull, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS

Everywhere you turn, you'll see a product with protein. There are high protein chips, bars, puffs, crackers and even water. Because we can't trust everything we read on a label, how do we know what product is a good, high quality source of protein?

Protein is a vital nutrient found in a variety of foods, including both animal and plant sources. It has an important role in the growth and maintenance of new cells and tissues. This would include our immune cells, red blood cells, skin and of course muscles. Protein is also unique in that it contains the element nitrogen. Carbohydrates and fats do not contain nitrogen. So, it's extremely hard to make protein from carbohydrates and fats because of this. Therefore, it's important to consume adequate protein from the diet to ensure your body can maintain its cells and tissues as well as grow new ones.



There are two types of protein that determine how well they can be digested and how complete they are so that the body can use them right away. They include complete protein and incomplete protein. Complete protein means it contains all the indispensable (previously known as essential) amino acids. These indispensable amino acids cannot be made by the body, so we must get these through dietary sources. Dispensable amino acids (previously known as non-essential) are ones that the body can make. Complete proteins are typically found in animal sources but can also be found in a few select plant sources, including soy, quinoa and hemp seeds. Incomplete proteins do not contain all the indispensable amino acids. These sources include all other plant foods, including vegetables, starches, beans, legumes and nuts. If you are vegetarian, particularly vegan, you can meet your protein needs by consuming a variety of protein sources daily. Food sources do not need to be combined as we used to previously suggest in order to get the indispensable amino acids (e.g. rice and beans together). Now the recommendation is to simply consume a variety of protein sources so that at the end of the day, you will have received all the indispensable amino acids. Complete proteins are considered to have a high biological availability. In other words, the body can break them down and absorb them well. Incomplete proteins have a lower biological availability, which means the body may not be able to utilize those proteins as well or right away.

In kids, protein is an underutilized nutrient to support growth and development as well as control appetite. If kids are complaining they are hungry, try to give them a protein-rich snack that will stay with them for longer than a carbohydrate-rich snack might. Be sure kids have enough protein at every meal. Portion sizes will vary due to the age and sex of your child but on average, strive for approximately 2 ounces (a pair of dice or your thumb is approximately 1 ounce). Parents often worry that they will feed their children too much protein putting them at risk for kidney problems, bone disease, or dehydration. There is no research to support those concepts. If your child is eating a variety of foods, including lean proteins, healthy fats and complex carbohydrates at meals and snacks, then your child should not be at risk for consuming a protein intake that will be detrimental to health. However, if you have any concerns at all, please talk to your doctor and/or dietitian.