

Protein



Though protein is often perceived as an area of concern for vegans, it is easy to get enough of it. The key is to eat a balanced and varied diet containing plenty of whole plant foods and adequate calories.

Why it's important

Protein is made up of amino acid building blocks. Some of them are essential amino acids, meaning that our bodies cannot make them. Protein is part of our muscles and bones, and our bodies use it for fighting infection, speeding up reactions, making hormones, carrying oxygen, growing and repairing. It can also be used as energy when there isn't enough coming from other sources.

Recommended intake

In the UK, a daily intake of 0.75g of protein per kilogram of body weight is recommended¹. For example, a person weighing 60kg would require a protein intake of about 45g per day. Some research indicates that vegans require a higher protein intake because of the way that our bodies handle plant protein. A daily intake of 1g per kilogram of body weight has been suggested².

Sources of protein

Some plant foods are particularly good sources of protein, including beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, soya alternatives to milk and yoghurt and peanuts. Other noteworthy sources include cashew nuts, pistachio nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, buckwheat, quinoa and wild rice. The table below shows you the protein contents of some of these foods:

Amount of food	Amount of protein ^{3,4} (g)
100g uncooked calcium-set tofu	8
80g cooked red lentils	7
80g reheated tinned kidney beans	6
80g reheated tinned chickpeas	6
25g peanut butter	6

Summary

- Ensure that most of your meals contain good sources of protein, such as beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, soya alternatives to milk and yoghurt or peanuts
- Other noteworthy sources of protein include cashew nuts, pistachio nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, buckwheat, quinoa and wild rice

References

1. COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY (1991) *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*, London: HMSO
2. KNISKERN, MA AND JOHNSTON, CS (2011) *Protein dietary reference intakes may be inadequate for vegetarians if low amounts of animal protein are consumed*, *Nutrition*, 27 (6), 727–730
3. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (2016) *Food Composition Databases* available from: <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/> (viewed 26-SEP-2016)
4. PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND (2015) *Composition of foods integrated dataset (CoFID)* available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/composition-of-foods-integrated-dataset-cofid> (viewed 26-SEP-2016)