

# But What About Protein?



by Dr. Teresa Jenkins, DCh

Every time I counsel someone to include more fruits and vegetables than meat in their diet, their first words are “but what about protein?” Many Americans bought into the myth that you must consume large quantities of meat to get enough dietary protein. Want strong muscles? Eat your meat, they say. Want more energy? Again, eat more meat.

These days, people get their diet information from TV commercials, talk shows, talk at the gym and on the Internet. Information overload lulls us into letting these sources provide our education. Commercials spout, “Where’s the beef” or “Drink your milk—it does a body good.” Certain personal trainers might teach that low cholesterol and low fat is the way to go, not realizing that cholesterol is critical to hormonal processes. If your cholesterol levels were too low your next question would be “where did my libido go” or “what happened to my muscles?” Dieticians also often recommend reducing sugar intake by substituting “the little blue

packets” when scientific research has shown that artificial sweeteners have serious detrimental effects on health. As a nation, we must wise up and question what we read, see and hear, including following a popular dietary edict. Ask questions like who paid for that ad? What scientific fact is that message based upon? Or, who is the source for that information?

So, with all these myths regarding protein, what are the facts? Webster’s Dictionary defines protein as “the total nitrogenous material in plant or animal substances.” All fish, poultry, pork, beef, eggs, cheese, milk, fruits and vegetables contain protein, but the question is how much? Do we really need to consume large quantities of meat and dairy products for protein?

Opinions vary as to exactly how much protein a person needs. Based on US Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA), .8 grams per kilogram of ideal body weight is the proper dietary protein amount. While the US RDA amounts for many nutrients are often

low, in this case they are overestimated.

The actual amount of protein needed to maintain nitrogen balance is really only .3 to .4 grams per kilogram of body weight for adults and .2 to .3 grams for children. This is approximately 47 grams per day for the average sized adult, equal to about two ounces of meat or two eggs. You’ll likely agree that this is far less than the average American thinks he or she needs. (Nutritive Value of American Foods in Common Units, USDA Handbook No. 456.)

Contrary to popular belief, plants contain much more protein than one would expect. Broccoli, for example, is 45% protein, walnuts are 13% protein and spinach is a whopping 49% protein. No wonder Popeye was such a big fan, and grandma was right all along. If you want to grow up to be big and strong, eat your veggies.

While I personally am not yet an advocate of total vegetarianism or raw foodism, I do know that most people eat far too few vegetables for their own good health. We have inverted and mixed up the ratios for balanced meals. I can remember, as a little girl, waking up on Sunday mornings to the sound of the pressure cooker cooking a roast beef for the whole family for the whole week. The rest of the meals were filled out with fruit from an uncle’s orchards and vegetables from our own garden. In these present days of processed and quick foods, most people consume very few fruits and vegetables, with meat as the main focus of every meal.

The bottom line is that to maintain pH balance, to experience an energetic life and be healthy, we must get back to the garden. Our diets should consist of 80% “alkaline ash” foods, such as fruits, vegetables, almonds, millet and quinoa grain. Treat your body and taste buds to great nutrition by making the first bites of every meal fresh and crunchy raw fruits and vegetables. Begin today, a little at a time. Add an extra vegetable to the table, a new raw vegetable, and cut the meat portions in half. Changing a habit is hard to do, but your health is worth it.

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