



PROTEIN

For proper functioning, our bodies need a combination of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. Protein is one of the most important elements for the maintenance of good health and vitality and is crucial in the growth and development of body components. Protein is important to the structure of red blood cells, for the proper functioning of antibodies for resisting infections, for the regulation of enzymes and hormones, and for growth and repair of body tissue and muscle.

Proteins consist of a 22 amino acids, 8 of which are considered essential (from food sources); the others can be manufactured in the body. The essential amino acids are considered complete proteins and are found primarily in animal products, especially eggs. Legumes and grains also contain proteins but must be combined with a grain such as rice to be considered a complete protein. Another fact to take note of is that protein combinations can take place over a 24-hour period. So, for instance, one can eat rice at lunch and beans for dinner and get the necessary combination of amino acids.

As a reference, below is a list of the approximate protein content (as a percent of total calories) of some foods:

Meat – 18 - 25%
Beans, Legumes – 22%
Eggs – 13%
Wheat – 11%
Quinoa – 14%
Rice 7%

Because our bodies don't store protein, we need to eat some protein every day. A deficiency in protein can lead to feeling cold and tired, lack of mental clarity, weak hair and nails, cuts that heal poorly, and sugar cravings. On the other hand, too much protein has been shown to cause heart disease, cancer, bad breath as well as a craving for sweets. A common misconception is that eating more protein makes muscles grow stronger. Physical work is what triggers genes to build more muscle tissue, not the consumption of additional protein.

It is also important to make sure that we get the right source of proteins, especially with animal products. Poultry and eggs should come from free-range chickens, raised without antibiotics; Beef, lamb and pork should be raised in humane conditions and grass-fed or pasture-raised. Fish should be wild and sustainably-raised – a good source of information on which fish to choose is the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch list at www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx. Grains and legumes should be whole and organic if possible.