

## Protein - What I Need to Know

Protein is essential for growth and repair in the body. It provides the building blocks for muscle, so getting enough is vital to keep everything running properly. Having enough muscle is important for everyday activities, and is especially important as we get older.

To maximise the benefits, getting enough protein should be combined with taking part in some form of activity where the muscles have to work against a resistance. We should take part in activities that do this at least twice each week.

Despite what many people think, the loss of muscle mass as we age can be prevented - or at least reduced - by getting enough protein and being active. Doing this helps to reduce frailty and the risk of falls. This helps us to stay independent for longer.

Protein can also be helpful with weight management. There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- It helps us feel fuller for longer, reducing hunger and helping us to eat less (and less often).
- The body has to use energy to digest food and use the building blocks. It takes more energy (calories) to break down and use protein than it takes for other nutrients.
- As noted before, protein helps to maintain muscle mass, which also helps with weight management. This is because having more muscle helps to keep metabolism higher, meaning the body will be burning more energy (calories) just to keep itself going!

Most people do not get enough protein though, so they do not fully experience the benefits it brings. It is recommended to have 3 to 6 portions of protein every day, though some people see benefits from having more than this! Examples of a portion of protein include 85g chicken or red meat (cooked), 100g fish, three eggs, or 110g pulses or lentils.



Building your meals around a good source of protein can help to ensure you get enough of it. Practically speaking this often means starting with one or two portions of protein (for example meat, fish, eggs or a non-animal protein source such as Quorn or Tofu), adding vegetables, then choosing what else you want to include to make the meal enjoyable and as nutritious as possible.

There are a number of myths around protein, including that it is bad for your kidneys and bones. Research shows that this is not true though. Some people are also concerned that protein will cause a big increase in blood glucose and insulin levels, but this doesn't usually happen to any major degree either, and is not something to be concerned with.

**Importantly, it is more likely that your health will suffer from not getting enough protein, than it is from having too much!**