

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.

To maximise the benefits, getting enough protein should be combined with taking part in activities where the muscles have to work against a resistance (e.g., lifting weights, body weight exercises, or yoga; tasks such as gardening or carrying the shopping can also count, if you are having to work hard enough). We should ideally take part in activities that do this at least twice each week.

Having enough muscle is important for everyday activities, and is especially important as we get older. Many people think that the loss of muscle mass as we age cannot be avoided, but it **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 can help people 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 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 can bring. 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 weight), 100g fish (cooked), three eggs, 175g tofu (raw, firm), 150g Quorn™ (uncooked), or 100g tempeh (cooked). You can also get protein from foods that would usually be placed in other food groups, such as nuts, seeds, yoghurt, cheese, pulses or beans.

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, 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. This does not usually happen to any major degree though, 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!

This topic is explored further on X-PERT programmes and in X-PERT Handbooks.

For more information, visit www.xperthealth.org.uk.