



Did You Know: Protein 101

Grilled fish or a tuna salad sandwich on whole wheat. Roasted chicken or a chicken lettuce wrap. Greek yogurt sprinkled with granola or Mexican burritos with rice and beans. What do they have in common? They're all good sources of protein—which means you can count on them to sustain you and give you energy for work, school, exercise and play throughout the day. Adequate protein may also help keep your hunger satisfied longer.



What is protein, and why is it important?

Many foods contain small amounts of protein, but the best sources are beef, poultry and fish; eggs and dairy products; and nuts, seeds and legumes like black beans, lentils, peanuts (and peanut butter!).

The USDA classifies all foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds as part of the Protein Foods Group. Beans and peas are also part of the Vegetable Group. (See ChooseMyPlate.gov for more info.)

What if you're vegetarian? Protein from animal sources (like meat and milk), is called complete, because it contains all nine of the essential amino acids. Most vegetable protein is considered incomplete because it lacks one or more of the essential amino acids. But people who eat a vegetarian diet can still get all their essential amino acids by eating a wide variety of vegetable foods that contain protein. Adding grains or dairy to many meals can make a complete protein—and a tastier, more varied meal.

Here are some combos that make complete vegetable proteins:

Legumes and grains

Legumes with nuts and/or seeds

Animal dairy products (eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt) with any vegetable protein

Grains with Legumes

Rice with black beans beans or lentils

Peanut butter sandwich (on whole wheat bread)



Bean taco

Whole-wheat pasta salad with kidney beans

Grains with Milk

Oatmeal with milk

Wheat cereal with milk

Pancakes or waffles

Pizza

Macaroni and cheese

So does this mean you have to eat all the essential amino acids in every meal? No, as long as you have a variety of protein sources throughout the day, your body will use what it needs from each meal along the way. It's all about balance.

Learn more by visiting:

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/protein-foods.html>