



A Simple guide to:

## PROTEIN

You probably know you need to eat protein, but what is it? Many foods contain protein but the best sources are beef, poultry (white meat, like chicken or turkey), fish, eggs, dairy products, nuts, seeds, and legumes like black beans and lentils.

Protein builds, maintains, and replaces the tissues in your body. Your muscles, your organs, and your immune system are made up mostly of protein.

Your body uses the protein you eat to make lots of specialized protein molecules that have specific jobs. For instance, your body uses protein to make **haemoglobin**, the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen to every part of your body

Other proteins are used to build cardiac muscle (in other words your heart). In fact, whether you're running or just hanging out, protein is doing important work like moving your legs, carrying oxygen to your body, and protecting you from disease.



### Amino Acids

When you eat foods that contain protein, the digestive juices in your stomach and intestine go to work. They break down the protein in food into basic units, called amino acids. The amino acids then can be reused to make the proteins your body needs to maintain muscles, bones, blood, and body organs.

Proteins are sometimes described as long necklaces with differently shaped beads. Each bead is a small amino acid. These amino acids can join together to make thousands of different proteins. Scientists have found many different amino acids in protein, but 22 of them are very important to human health.

Of those 22 amino acids, your body can make 13 of them without you ever thinking about it. Your body can't make the other nine amino acids, but you can get them by eating protein-rich foods. They are called essential amino acids because it's **essential** that you get them from the foods you eat.

## **Complete and Incomplete Protein**

Protein from animal sources, such as 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. This can be a concern for someone who doesn't eat meat or milk products. But people who eat a vegetarian diet can still get all their essential amino acids by eating a wide variety of protein-rich vegetable foods.

For instance, you can't get all the amino acids you need from peanuts alone, but if you have peanut butter on whole-grain bread, you're set. Likewise, red beans won't give you everything you need, but red beans and rice will do the trick.

The good news is that you don't have to eat all the essential amino acids in every meal. As long as you have a variety of protein sources throughout the day, your body will grab what it needs from each meal.

## **How much Protein should I eat?**

The easiest answer is two palms worth during the day. Probably 50 to 60 grams if we are thinking about weight. You might think it would be good to have a lot more as this would help build more muscle and help your body more? No. Your body takes in what it needs. Any excess will be disregarded and can turn into body fat and you could put on weight.

There is also a lot of talk about protein shakes, drinks and supplements. Unless you are training very hard in the gym, these would actually do nothing at all and, ultimately, would be a waste of money.

## **Conclusion**

Your body needs protein and therefore you need to ensure you consume a decent amount. Like all advice that HMHB gives – this is your responsibility and your choice. But you will be healthier and fitter if you think more about your nutrition intake, and how your body works, along with its needs. Give yourself the best chance of a longer healthier life.

