Protein, a nutrient found in both animal and plant foods, is vital for life. Recently, protein has been getting more attention for its role in managing weight, building and repairing muscle after workouts, and preserving muscle and bone as you age. Read on to learn more about why you need protein, how to be sure you’re getting the right amount, and the many foods that supply protein.

**Why You Need Protein**

The body needs a regular supply of protein to make and repair cells. Protein is made up of amino acids, which are combined in the body to form different proteins that have many important functions. For example, proteins are part of enzymes and hormones, help defend against infection, assist with muscle contraction, and more. Eating meals and snacks that contain protein also helps to satisfy your appetite and may help keep your blood sugar stable.

**Getting the Right Amount of Protein**

The amount of protein you should get from your food choices depends on your age, sex, and how active you are. A healthy amount of daily protein is about 10% to 35% of your total calorie needs.

- **Most adults** should aim for at least the midpoint of this range.
- **Athletes’ needs** may be at the high end of the range, depending on their level of activity.
- **The range for children (4 to 18 years)** is about 10% to 30% of total calories.

**Protein Foods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protein Foods</th>
<th>1,600 calories</th>
<th>2,000 calories</th>
<th>2,400 calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>40–140 grams</td>
<td>50–175 grams</td>
<td>60–210 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daily Calories</strong></td>
<td><strong>Protein Per Day</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Use this daily food group advice as a guide to help meet your energy, protein, and other nutrient needs.**

- **Protein Foods**
  - 5 ounces
  - 5 ½ ounces
  - 6 ounces
- **Dairy**
  - 3 cups
- **Grains**
  - 5 ounces
  - 6 ounces
  - 7 ounces
- **Vegetables**
  - 2 cups
  - 2 ½ cups
  - 3 cups
- **Fruits**
  - 1 ½ cups

**Source:** 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans