

The Importance of Protein II

Last time we discussed the importance of protein and the dangers of not consuming enough protein as it relates to your immunity, strength and endurance. [Click here](#) to read part I.

Now that you know the importance of protein in your diet, you need to make good decisions regarding the source of protein that you eat. For vegetarians, getting enough protein can be a challenge; soy and certain combinations of legumes and grains can supply all essential amino acids, however combining them correctly to get enough complete protein. For individuals that eat meat and dairy products, getting enough protein should not be a problem. However, there are some health considerations if you're going to eat a lot of meat, dairy and eggs as your primary protein source such as saturated fat intake and cholesterol. The key, as with most things, is moderation.

Consuming a variety of foods from complete protein sources such as eggs, meat, fish, whey or soy improves the potential of your body getting adequate protein and more specifically, all of the amino acids on a daily basis. However, if your body is healthy, eating some less-than-perfect foods from time to time will not have much of a negative effect on your health, wellness and performance. The main thing to avoid is not eating protein foods at all.

Healthy aspects of animal foods

Humans have been consuming animal food for centuries – specifically meat, fish and eggs. Despite what some mainstream media outlets may report, the human G.I. tract is well adapted for consuming food from animal sources, with a history of mankind eating high quality protein, low carbohydrate diet with varying amounts of raw fruits, vegetables & nuts. There are some unique features of an animal food diet that are vital for health, wellness and performance:

- Animal foods contain all essential amino acids
- Vitamin A is found only in animal products
- Vitamin B12 is an essential nutrient found only in animal foods
- Iron deficiency is prevented by eating animal foods which contain this mineral and in its most bio-available form
- EPA, the most powerful fatty acid and the one most preferred by the human body, is almost exclusively found in animal foods
- Animal products are considered dense protein foods with little or no carbohydrates interfere with digestion and absorption
- People who consume less animal proteins have greater rates of bone loss than those who need larger amounts of animal protein.

The Egg-Perfect Protein

Eggs have been called the “perfect protein food”. They have one of the most complete, and highest, rating of any protein food, containing all of the essential amino acids. Additionally, eggs also contain many essential nutrients including significant amounts of vitamins A, D, E, B1 B2 B6 folic acid and especially vitamin B12.

Simple Facts about eggs:

- An extra-large egg contains approximately 75 calories; 31 grams of protein and 2 grams of carbohydrate
- Eggs also contain minerals including calcium magnesium potassium zinc and iron. Choline and biotin, also important for energy production and stress management, are contained in large amounts in eggs. Most of these nutrients are found in the yoke of an egg.
- The fat in an egg yolk is also nearly a perfect balance containing mostly mono-unsaturated fats and about 36% saturated fat.
- Egg yolks contain linoleic and linolenic - both essential fatty acids.
- Eggs have almost no carbohydrates making them the perfect meal or snack for the millions who are carbohydrate intolerant.
- Eggs come in many sizes and colors, not just white and brown. The color is dependent on the type of chicken, where & when the egg is laid.
- Eggs should always be stored in the refrigerator.
- Because the egg shell is porous, there is a slight amount of evaporation of moisture from the inner egg which changes its flavor and freshness.
- If you're not using your eggs quickly, then store them in a sealed container to prevent loss of moisture.
- Never store eggs next to highly flavored foods such as onions and fish because they will absorb these strong flavors.

Most people may love the taste of eggs but are concerned about eating them because of cholesterol. Saturated fat in the diet has been shown to be more closely linked to a high cholesterol level than the actual cholesterol ingested through the diet. While eggs are fairly high in cholesterol (~186 mg.) they are also rich in nutrients that are healthy and beneficial for your cardiovascular system.

While eggs are one of nature's most perfect foods, they're only as healthy as the hens that lay them, since the nutritional make up of eggs, especially the fat, is dependent on what the chickens eat. The healthiest eggs are those that come from organic free range hens. This means that the chickens are raised on land that has been certified organic, free range hens.

If you can't find organic-free range eggs, most grocery stores carry either one or the other: organic or free range. While organic and free range may cost a bit more than regular eggs, they remain a protein bargain. And if you can't find organic or free range eggs, regular grocery store eggs are better than no eggs at all.

Before you buy your eggs, make sure that they are relatively fresh by looking at the date on the package. Another way to check for freshness is to shake them close to your ear. If you hear a sloshing sound, it is evident that the egg has lost a significant amount of moisture and there's a big airspace within - avoid these eggs. Eggs also contain a natural barrier and invisible protecting coding which keeps out bacteria, never wash the eggs you're going to store because you remove this natural protection.

Beef-Protein Powerhouse

Look at the nutritional facts of a 3 ounces lean porterhouse:

- At least 70% water, contains 20 g of protein,
- 6 g of saturated fat and balanced by 7 g of monounsaturated fat.
- Rich in B vitamins, glutamine, calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc and other nutrients that are lacking in many diets.

With the threat of mad cow disease over the last few years, it is becoming more important to buy beef that has not been fed with feeds that contain animal by-products. Organically raised beef cattle are fed only certified organic feed and graze on organically certified land. Organic and natural beef have also not been treated with antibiotics or growth hormones.

You can buy free range meat some grocery & health food stores. You can check on the Internet for farms or ranches that sell meat from animals that have been raised naturally without the use of growth hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals. Part III will cover other quality protein sources.

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