

The Importance of Protein III

In part I, we discussed the importance of protein and the dangers of not consuming enough protein as it relates to your immunity, strength and endurance. Last time we looked at some of the higher quality choices of protein. This week we continue to outline and discuss the various protein sources. [Click here](#) to read part I if you missed the first article on protein and [click here](#) to read part II if you missed the last article.

Fish – The Power of Omega 3

Fish is not only a very good source of protein, but also contains significant amounts of essential fatty acids - especially omega-3 fats. However just as with other protein foods, some fish are healthier choices than others. For instance if you're eating farm raised salmon or other fish, your catch of the day may include antibiotic's, pesticides, steroids, hormones and artificial pigments. Additionally, pollution of waterways and oceans has increased the potential danger to eating all fish and seafood, mainly because of mercury levels.

If possible, a better choice may be fish that is wild. However this is not perfectly safe either. One study found that more than 74% of wild fish caught near fish farms contained antibiotics from eating feed that drifted out of the fish farm pens. In addition to feeds from the fish farms, there are other concerns to eating wild fish. Contamination is possible due to infection from bacteria or viruses, heavy metals such as mercury, food additives such as sulfites and histamines, pesticides such as DDT and other chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's).

As a general rule, avoid consuming seafood that includes the so-called "bottom feeders". These fish eat from the ocean's floor where toxic material is at its highest concentration levels. This is especially true for those species that feed close to shore. Flounder, sole, catfish and crabs are some examples of foods to be cautious of. Oysters, clams, mussels and scallops are also sources of potential pollutants.

If you enjoy eating seafood, here are some tips for doing so more safely and more nutritiously:

- Choose fish and crustaceans caught far away from polluted industrial areas. Some examples are northern Maine lobster, Canadian salmon, sardines and herring.
- Look for cold water fish like salmon, tuna, sardines and others which contain higher amounts of omega-3 fat and EPA.
- Eat smaller fish and crustaceans; Trout, bass and shrimp rather than Marlon and swordfish. Smaller and younger fish have not accumulated the toxins found in larger and older species.
- Avoid pre-cooked fish, and prepared or processed seafood such as breaded fish or seafood, fish cakes, ground fish and imitation crab meat.
- If you catch your own fish, ask local authorities about the limits of safety. Some regions recommend limiting how much of certain species you should eat any year.

Other meats

In addition to beef, poultry and fish, other meats can also be good sources of protein. Pork and lamb are popular meats, and recently, more exotic meat such as buffalo has appeared in some grocery stores and fresh markets. When choosing these meats, use the same guidelines as with beef and poultry – buy those that are raised naturally, or better yet, organically.

Wild Game

Including big-game animals such as deer and elk, as well as, small game such as rabbits and game birds, is also another great source of protein. Wild game meat is generally leaner but higher in essential fatty acids than domestic meats. While hunting your own meat is nearly ideal, there's a growing concern in some areas like the northeastern United States that the use of pesticides and other environmental chemicals have affected wild animals. But in general, wild game is much safer than store bought meat.

Ground Meat (of any kind)

One of the worst types of protein to consume is ground meat of any kind. Avoid all ground beef, poultry, pork or other meats, unless it has been freshly ground right before you freeze or consume immediately.

Ground meat is a haven for bacteria and can ferment in your intestine much worse than whole meat. If you like ground meat, or have a recipe that requires it, it is better to buy a large piece of meat and have it ground up just before cooking – most butchers, even those in large grocery stores, will do this for you. Also, beware of other meats that have been cut, such as sliced meat, chopped meat and stew meat. Try to buy as large a piece of meat as possible and cut it yourself.

Please Pass the Cheese

Cheese, cottage cheese and plain yogurt are dairy products that contain quality protein without many of the problems associated with milk such as lactose intolerance. This is especially true if you can find products made from goat or sheep milk rather than cow milk. Goat and sheep milk are much more compatible for humans than cow milk. Cultured products, such as these, are good sources of protein because the lactose, or milk sugar, has been consumed by bacteria in the culturing process. These bacteria literally gobble up the sugar. To be sure that an item is fully cultured, check the nutritional facts on the label; the carbohydrate should be very low. However, not all popular brands of yogurt are fully cultured. Also, be careful with the fruit flavored varieties, as they are usually of sugar, with some containing more than ice cream.

If you use cheese, whole milk cottage cheese or yogurt as your protein sources, it's important to remember that these can also be high in fat. Avoid American cheese, cheese spreads and other processed cheeses.

Whey protein

There are two proteins found in milk: curds and whey. Whey protein is the thin liquid part of milk remaining after the casein (the curds) and fat are removed. Whey is the part of the milk containing most of the vitamins and minerals, including calcium. Whey is a complete protein. Its nutritional and therapeutic values are well documented, and this food is often referred to as nutraceutical.

Biothiols are a group of natural sulfur containing substances that promote basic antioxidant activity in your cells, and are contained in high amounts in whey. In providing this vital raw material, whey is a key food for the immune system – one that can help prevent and treat many chronic conditions, from asthma and allergies to cancer and heart disease. It can also help improve muscle function.

The body uses the biothiols in whey as a raw material to produce a substance called glutathione. This substance is at the heart of regulating the bodies' antioxidant defense mechanism, and is even more important than vitamin C and E, and others in that group of popular antioxidants.

Those who are allergic to cow's milk can usually consume whey without problems but not in every case. Small amounts of lactose are found in whey (much less than is found in liquid milk), but this is usually too little to cause intestinal problems. In those who are truly lactose intolerant (less than 5% of the population), this amount of lactose could be a problem.

Whey protein is contained in high amounts in certain cheeses, such as Italian ricotta (check the ingredient label on ricotta to make sure the main ingredient is whey). Avoid highly processed whey products such as those which contain whey-protein isolate and caseinate.

Myths and facts about Soy

Soy is one vegetarian source that is considered a complete protein. Whole green soybeans are excellent sources of protein and also fiber. Soy products such as tofu also contain quality protein.

When buying products that contain soy, it is important to avoid those which have been highly processed. These include soy protein isolate and caseinates and hydrolyzed soy, which often contain mono-sodium glutamate (MSG) as a byproduct of processing. This MSG byproduct is usually not listed in the ingredients.

Soy is acceptable as a food and food ingredient only if it reflects real soybean quantity and quality rather than a highly processed product. Examples of real soy foods include soy beans, tofu and soy concentrates with the same amino acid profile as whole soybeans.

Many people think soy is a wonder food. But like all foods, some people will benefit from soy while others may not. In fact, just as many people maybe intolerant to soy as dairy. In addition, soy products fortified with concentrated isoflavones can pose serious dangers, including an

increased risk of cancer, particularly for postmenopausal women, the very audiences products are marketed to by the big companies. This may also contribute to hormone imbalance.

By choosing a variety of protein sources: eggs, beef, poultry, fish and other meats, as well as cultured dairy products and soy, you will obtain a wide variety of nutrients. One final thought, when cooking beef keep it on the rare side. Studies show that beef cooked medium, medium well or well is associated with higher rates of stomach cancer. This is due to the production of carcinogens from naturally occurring creatinine during cooking. Heat sensitive nutrients such as the amino acids glutamine are also significantly reduced in the cook beyond rare.

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