

Wellness Wednesday



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Here's How to Know if You're Eating Enough Protein

In today's health-conscious world, protein has become a buzzword, with countless social media influencers touting its benefits and offering tips for incorporating more of it into our daily meals. But how much protein do we really need, and how can we tell if we're getting enough? In this Wellness Wednesday, we'll delve into the importance of protein, the recommended intake levels, and the telltale signs that may indicate a protein deficiency. You'll have a better understanding of your individual protein needs and how to ensure you're fueling your body with the right amount of this essential macronutrient.



The Importance of Protein

Protein is a macronutrient that plays a vital role in the growth, repair, and maintenance of the body's tissues. It's essential for building and preserving muscle mass, supporting immune function, and aiding in the body's natural healing processes. Adequate protein intake is particularly important for active individuals, athletes, and those looking to maintain or build muscle mass.

The Functions of Protein

- **Tissue Growth and Repair:** Protein is the building block for muscles, organs, and other bodily tissues, making it crucial for growth and repair.
- **Immune System Support:** Protein helps to create antibodies, which are essential for a strong and healthy immune system.
- **Hormone Production:** Many hormones are made from protein, including those that regulate metabolism, growth, and sexual function.
- **Energy Production:** Protein can be used as a source of energy when carbohydrates and fats are in short supply.

The Role of Protein in Satiety and Muscle Maintenance

In addition to its structural and functional benefits, protein also plays a crucial role in maintaining a healthy appetite and preserving muscle tissue. Studies have shown that protein-rich foods tend to be more satiating, meaning they can help you feel fuller for longer and potentially support weight management efforts. Moreover, adequate protein intake is essential for preserving and building lean muscle mass, particularly for individuals who are physically active or looking to improve their body composition.

Determining Your Protein Needs

The amount of protein you need each day can vary depending on several factors, including your gender, age, body size, and activity level. While there are general guidelines, it's important to consider your individual needs and goals when determining your optimal protein intake.

Recommended Protein Intake

- Sedentary Individuals: 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day
- Active Individuals: 1.0 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day
- Strength-Training Athletes: 1.6 to 2.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day
- For example, a sedentary individual weighing 180 pounds (81.8 kilograms) would need approximately 65 grams of protein per day, while an active individual of the same weight would require between 81 and 130 grams.

Assessing Your Protein Intake

Keeping a food diary or tracking your protein intake can be a helpful way to ensure you're meeting your daily needs. Additionally, consulting with a registered dietitian or healthcare professional can provide personalized guidance and recommendations based on your specific circumstances and goals.

Recognizing the Signs of Protein Deficiency

While protein deficiency is relatively rare in developed countries, it's still important to be aware of the potential signs and symptoms. Recognizing these early indicators can help you take proactive steps to address any shortfalls in your dietary intake.

Physical Symptoms of Protein Deficiency

- Thinning or Patchy Hair: Protein is essential for healthy hair growth, and a deficiency can lead to thinning or patchy hair.
- Changes in Skin Tone: Protein deficiency can cause a loss of natural skin pigmentation, leading to a pale or dull complexion.
- Brittle or Grooved Nails: Protein is necessary for the proper development of nails, and a deficiency can result in horizontal grooves or a concave shape.
- Slow Wound Healing: Protein plays a crucial role in the body's natural healing process, and a deficiency can slow down the healing of wounds or injuries.
- Muscle Wasting: Inadequate protein intake can lead to a decrease in lean muscle mass, particularly in active individuals or those who regularly engage in strength training.

Functional Symptoms of Protein Deficiency

- Fatigue and Weakness: Protein is essential for energy production, and a deficiency can lead to feelings of tiredness and a general lack of physical strength.
- Weakened Immune System: Protein is necessary for the proper functioning of the immune system, and a deficiency can make you more susceptible to illness and infection.
- Increased Hunger and Cravings: Protein is a macronutrient that promotes satiety, and a deficiency can result in increased hunger and food cravings.

It's important to note that these symptoms can also be indicative of other underlying health conditions, so it's essential to consult with a healthcare professional for an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

Incorporating Protein-Rich Foods into Your Diet

If you suspect that you may not be getting enough protein, there are numerous delicious and nutritious food options that can help you meet your daily needs.

Lean Protein Sources

- Meat: Chicken, turkey, lean beef, and pork
- Fish: Salmon, tuna, cod, and trout
- Eggs: Whole eggs and egg whites
- Plant-based protein sources
- Legumes: Beans, lentils, and peas
- Nuts and Seeds: Almonds, walnuts, chia seeds, and hemp seeds
- Soy Products: Tofu, tempeh, and edamame
- Grains: Quinoa, buckwheat, and oats
- Protein-Packed Snacks
- Hard-Boiled Eggs: A convenient and portable protein-rich snack
- Greek Yogurt: High in protein and can be paired with fresh fruit or granola
- Protein Bars: Look for options with minimal added sugars and a balanced macronutrient profile
- Beef Jerky: A portable and shelf-stable protein-rich snack

Remember, it's important to focus on a well-rounded, nutrient-dense diet that includes a variety of protein sources, rather than relying solely on protein-fortified products or supplements.

Consulting with Professionals for Personalized Guidance

If you're still unsure about your protein needs or suspect a deficiency, it's best to consult with a health-care professional or a registered dietitian. They can provide personalized guidance based on your individual circumstances, including your health status, activity level, and dietary preferences.

Collaborating with a Registered Dietitian

A registered dietitian can be an invaluable resource in helping you optimize your protein intake. They can:

- Assess Your Current Intake: Review your dietary habits and provide personalized recommendations for meeting your protein needs.
- Develop a Balanced Meal Plan: Suggest protein-rich foods and recipes that fit your tastes, lifestyle, and dietary preferences.
- Monitor Your Progress: Track your protein intake over time and make adjustments as needed to ensure you're meeting your goals.
- By working closely with healthcare professionals, you can ensure that you're getting the right amount of protein to support your overall health and well-being.

By understanding the recommended intake levels, recognizing the signs of a potential deficiency, and incorporating a variety of protein-rich foods into your diet, you can ensure that you're fueling your body with the nutrients it needs to thrive. Remember, consulting with healthcare professionals can provide personalized guidance and support to help you achieve your optimal protein intake and overall health goals.



INGREDIENTS

Ingredients

9 cups watermelon, cut in large circles with a melon baller
2 loose cups baby arugula
8 to 10 fresh spearmint leaves, chopped
8 ounce package feta cheese, crumbled in large chunks

Pairing Suggestions

When it comes to pairing the Watermelon Feta Salad, the possibilities are endless. It pairs beautifully with grilled shrimp, crab legs, or even a juicy steak, providing a cooling contrast to the warmth of the main dish. For a vegetarian-friendly option, the salad can be enjoyed alongside roasted vegetables or a hearty grain-based dish.

The arrival of summer brings with it a delightful array of seasonal produce, and one of the most iconic summer staples is undoubtedly the humble watermelon. While often enjoyed on its own, this juicy fruit can also be transformed into a truly remarkable salad that perfectly captures the essence of the season. Introducing the captivating Watermelon Feta Salad - a symphony of flavors that will delight your taste buds and leave you craving more.

SELECTING THE PERFECT WATERMELON

When it comes to creating the perfect Watermelon Feta Salad, the selection of the watermelon is crucial. Look for a watermelon that is heavy for its size, with a creamy yellow spot on one side, indicating that it is ripe and ready for consumption. Avoid watermelons with bruises, dents, or soft spots, as these may compromise the overall quality of the salad.

THE HARMONIOUS BLEND OF FLAVORS

The beauty of the Watermelon Feta Salad lies in the harmonious blend of its key ingredients. The sweet and juicy watermelon is complemented by the tangy and creamy feta cheese, creating a delightful contrast that tantalizes the taste buds. The addition of fresh, fragrant herbs, such as mint or basil, further enhances the salad's flavor profile, adding a refreshing and aromatic touch.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 cup, Calories: 85 kcal, Carbohydrates: 9.5 g, Protein: 3.5 g, Fat: 4 g, Saturated Fat: 3 g, Cholesterol: 17 mg, Sodium: 213.5 mg, Fiber: 0.5 g, Sugar: 8 g



INSTRUCTIONS



HOW TO MAKE IT

1. Start by using a melon baller, and prepare the watermelon into large balls. If you don't have one simply cut into 1/2 inch chunks. Set aside in a bowl until ready to serve.
2. About 30 minutes before you're ready to serve, drain the liquid from the bowl (I poured it into a cup and drank it!).
3. Scatter half of the watermelon into a large, shallow serving bowl and scatter half of the arugula and feta on top, repeat with the remaining watermelon, arugula and feta then top everything with fresh mint.

VARIATIONS

- Sub mint in this watermelon salad for basil or cilantro.
- Add cucumber or red onion for extra veggies.
- Swap the feta for goat cheese.
- Use balsamic glaze for drizzling.

Featured Exercise ► Bodyweight Dips



HOW TO DO IT:

- Start seated on the floor with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and hands on the floor behind you with fingers facing forward. Engage your core and lift your hips until your torso is straight (your hip flexors are fully extended).
- From here, with your core engaged, bend both elbows and lower back down until your butt taps the floor. Work to keep your elbows parallel to your body—don't let your elbows wing out.
- Keeping yourself supported with your hands, straighten both arms to push back up.
- Repeat, keeping your core tight throughout and weight in your arms.



THE BENEFITS:

The primary muscle group targeted during bodyweight dips is the triceps, the three-headed muscle that makes up the back of the upper arm. By engaging in this pushing movement, you'll be able to develop impressive triceps strength and size, which not only contributes to the overall aesthetics of your arms but also enhances your pressing power across a variety of exercises.

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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