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Plant-Based Protein Sources: How to Get Enough Protein on a Vegan or Vegetarian Diet

1. Introduction

Eating a diet with limited or no animal products means you need to understand how to get complete proteins from plant sources. Unlike meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy, most plant foods do not contain all 9 essential amino acids required to form a complete protein. However, by eating a variety of complementary plant proteins, vegans and vegetarians can easily meet their protein needs.

This article will discuss the best plant-based protein sources and how to combine them to get all essential amino acids.

2. What Is a Complete Protein?

Proteins are made up of amino acids, which are organic compounds that link together like beads on a string. There are 20 total amino acids that join to form proteins, 9 of which are considered "essential" because our bodies cannot produce them - they must be obtained from food sources.

Complete proteins contain all 9 essential amino acids in sufficient amounts. Animal products like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy are complete proteins.

On the other hand, most plant foods are considered "incomplete" proteins because they only contain some of the essential amino acids. By pairing certain plant foods together, you can form a complete protein profile.

3. Why Plant Proteins Are Important

Most people associate protein with meat and assume vegetarians/vegans may be deficient. However, plant foods can absolutely provide adequate protein for all adults when balanced properly. Some key benefits of plant-based proteins include:

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- [High in fiber](https://bit.ly/3l5l9aF) which promotes digestion and heart health -Cholesterol-free and lower in saturated fat than animal proteins
- Rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals not found in meats
- Linked to reduced risk of chronic illness and longer lifespan
- More environmentally sustainable than large-scale meat production
- Avoid unethical issues associated with factory farming

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Recommended Intake for Protein The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein is 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight per day for adults. This equates to:

56 grams per day for the average sedentary man

46 grams per day for the average sedentary woman

Active individuals or athletes may need up to 1.4-2.0 grams per kilogram. As long as caloric intake is adequate, it is not difficult to meet protein needs on a plant-based diet.

<h2>4. Best Plant-Based Protein Sources</h2>

<p>All plant foods contain at least some protein, but certain groups are richer sources:</p>

<h3>4.1. Beans and Legumes</h3>

<p>This group provides the most protein among plant foods, with each 1-cup cooked serving to provide approximately:</p>

Beans (black, pinto, garbanzo, kidney) - 15-17g

Lentils - 18g

Peas - 8-10g

Peanuts - 7g (per 1&frac1;4 cup)

<p>Beans and legumes also offer fiber, iron, potassium, magnesium, and zinc.</p>

<h3>4.2. Nuts and Seeds</h3>

<p>Nuts and seeds are great options with about 5-7g protein per 1oz serving:</p>

Almonds, walnuts, cashews, pistachios

Chia seeds, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds

<h3>4.3. Soy Products</h3>

<p>Soybeans are considered a complete protein. Soy foods include:</p>

Tofu (10g per 1&frac1;2 cup)

Tempeh (15g per 1&frac1;2 cup)

Edamame (17g per 1 cup)

Soy milk (6-10g per 1 cup)

<h3>4.4. Grains</h3>

<p> Whole grains including quinoa, amaranth, buckwheat, oats, brown rice, wheat germ, and barley contain decent plant-based protein with about 2-6g per cooked cup.</p>

<p>How to Combine Plant Proteins As mentioned earlier, most

plant proteins are incomplete meaning they do not contain all 9 essential amino acids. However, combining certain complementary plant proteins within a meal or even during the same day can provide a complete protein with the full amino acid profile. Some examples of protein-rich pairings include:

Rice and beans

Whole grain bread with nut butter

Oatmeal with almond milk and chia seeds

Green salad with chickpeas and hemp seed dressing

Lentil soup with whole grain crackers

Tofu veggie stir fry over quinoa

<p>As you can see, balanced plant-based meals can easily meet protein needs. Vegans may also want to include a plant-based protein powder supplement made from blends of pea, rice, hemp, and soy to ensure they get all essential amino acids, especially if exercise is vigorous.</p>

<h2>5. Sample Meal Plan to Meet Protein Needs</h2>

<p>Here is a sample high protein day for a plant-based eater:</p>

<p>Breakfast:</p>

1 cup oatmeal made with almond milk, topped with 1 Tbsp almond butter and 1&frac;4 cup blueberries (13g protein)

Snack:

1&frac;4 cup nuts of choice (7g protein)

<p>Lunch:</p>

Big green salad with 1 cup chickpeas, hemp seed dressing (15g protein)

Whole grain roll (5g protein)

<p>Dinner:</p>

1 cup lentils over 1 cup quinoa (18g protein)

1 cup broccoli (4g protein)

<p>Snack:</p>

Protein shake with pea and rice protein (20g)

Daily Total = Approximately 80-85g protein

This provides more than adequate protein for the average woman. Men can increase protein content at meals by including slightly larger portions of the foods above.

6. Conclusion

A balanced plant-based diet can easily meet daily protein requirements when you include a variety of protein-rich foods like beans, legumes, nuts, seeds, soy products, and whole grains.

Combining complementary proteins ensures you get all the essential amino acids your body needs for good health. With proper meal planning, vegetarians and vegans can thrive without the need to consume meat, eggs, or dairy.