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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:

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">56 grams per day for the average sedentary man</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">46 grams per day for the average sedentary woman</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">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.</span></li>

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

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">All plant foods contain at least some protein, but certain groups are richer sources:</span></p>

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

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">This group provides the most protein among plant foods, with each 1-cup cooked serving to provide approximately:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Beans (black, pinto, garbanzo, kidney) - 15-17g</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Lentils - 18g</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Peas - 8-10g</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Peanuts - 7g (per 1&frac14; cup)</span></li>

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<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Beans and legumes also offer fiber, <a href="https://bit.ly/3yLeJTS">iron</a>, potassium, magnesium, and zinc.</span></p>

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

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Nuts and seeds are great options with about 5-7g protein per 1oz serving:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Almonds, walnuts, cashews, pistachios</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Chia seeds, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds</span></li>

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### <h3>4.3. Soy Products</h3>

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Soybeans are considered a complete protein. Soy foods include:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Tofu (10g per 1&frac12; cup)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Tempeh (15g per 1&frac12; cup)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Edamame (17g per 1 cup)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Soy milk (6-10g per 1 cup)</span></li>

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### <h3>4.4. Grains</h3>

<p><strong>&nbsp;<span style="font-size: 14pt;">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</span></strong><span style="font-size: 14pt;">.</span></p>

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">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:

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Rice and beans</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Whole grain bread with nut butter</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Oatmeal with almond milk and chia seeds</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Green salad with chickpeas and hemp seed dressing</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Lentil soup with whole grain crackers</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Tofu veggie stir fry over quinoa</span></li>

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<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">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.</span></p>

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

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Here is a sample high protein day for a plant-based eater:</span></p>

<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Breakfast:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">1 cup oatmeal made with almond milk, topped with 1 Tbsp almond butter and 1&frac;4 cup blueberries (13g protein)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Snack:</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">1&frac;4 cup nuts of choice (7g protein)</span></li>

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<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Lunch:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Big green salad with 1 cup chickpeas, hemp seed dressing (15g protein)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Whole grain roll (5g protein)</span></li>

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<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Dinner:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">1 cup lentils over 1 cup quinoa (18g protein)</span></li>

<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">1 cup broccoli (4g protein)</span></li>

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<p><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Snack:</span></p>

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<li><span style="font-size: 14pt;">Protein shake with pea and rice protein (20g)</span></li>

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**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.