

HEALTHmatters

On a Plant-Based Diet, Where Do You Get Your Protein?

by Karen Pullen



If you've adopted the plant-based way of eating, that's a question you're going to hear, far more often than you'll like.

The easiest answer is: The same place that a cow gets hers. From plants.

The plant-based way of eating supplies more than adequate protein, as long as you consume enough calories and a variety of whole unprocessed fruits and vegetables, nuts, grains and legumes.

Americans are obsessed with protein. You'll hear, "I need protein to feel full." Or, "I need protein to have energy to get through the day." And "I need protein for my workout." The food industry has responded with products: protein powders, protein shakes, protein bars, even high-protein pretzels. Write PROTEIN on the wrapper and it sounds healthy, even if lacking in fiber and nutrients.

I watch cooking shows, and when the chefs say protein, they usually mean animal meat. But protein is not the same as meat, or a powder, or a pretzel. In fact, there is no one "protein." Our body constructs thousands of different protein molecules from twenty different amino acids, nine which must come from food.

These nine protein building blocks, essential amino acids, come from what we eat. But your body does not care about the source of its amino acids. Whether pork or pecans, the food will be digested, broken down, and reassembled into protein molecules—for example, collagen, hemoglobin, insulin, or digestive enzymes—essential to the function of our bodies.

A cow gets her proteins from plants. When you skip the "middle moo" and, like the cow, get your protein from plants, you are getting the

same amino acids, but the rest of the package is much healthier than if you were eating the cow. Whole plant foods also contain fiber, lipids, vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants, phytonutrients and an assortment of protective compounds, most of which still remain undiscovered.

A carrot is a symphony of nutrients designed by Mother Nature, substances that our body uses to stay healthy.

All plants contain protein, but some, particularly nuts and beans, provide a greater amount per serving. Almonds provide 16 grams per half-cup, and cashews, 10 grams. A cup of edamame (young soybeans) contains a whopping 29 grams of protein. Cooked kidney, pinto, black, and lima beans contain 15 grams per cup. The grain quinoa provides 8 grams per cup, while seitan—made from wheat gluten—has 21 grams per three ounces.

If you're concerned, and want to track your protein intake, how much protein should you aim for? The Recommended Daily Allowance for protein is 0.8 grams/kg of ideal body weight, so multiply your ideal weight in pounds by 0.36. If you weigh 140 pounds, that's 50 grams of protein. If you weigh 200 pounds, 72 grams.

How does this target translate to your daily diet? You can track your protein intake by recording your foods in a tool like Cronometer—online and free—which also computes fats, carbs, and certain vitamins and minerals.

But all that computing, tracking, and counting is boring, anxious-making, and highly unnecessary.

Eat a variety of whole plant foods and enough calories—which you really don't have to count either—and don't worry about protein.

That being said, sometimes I feel reassured to know my smoothie is full of plant protein, like this delicious chocolate shake, with 18 grams of protein per serving.

Karen Pullen is a mystery writer and the former owner of a vegetarian B&B. Certified in plant-based nutrition from Cornell, she is studying to be a plant-based chef. Contact her through her website, www.everydayplant-based.com

CHOCOLATE PROTEIN SHAKE (serves two)

- 1 banana
- ¼ cup oats
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 2 tablespoon chia seeds
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seed
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder
- 2 cups unsweetened soy milk or almond milk
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup

INSTRUCTIONS Place all ingredients in a blender and process until creamy. Taste. If needed for flavor, add more cocoa powder; for creaminess, more peanut butter; to thin, more milk.



It's HOT Outside! Cool Tips to Keep You Hydrated

by Robin Thomas



No doubt about it, it's hot here in NC in the summer, with more than half of July days over 90, and August not much cooler. And when it's this hot,

it's even more important to stay hydrated. We all sweat more, especially when working or exercising in the heat and dehydration can lead to serious heat-related illnesses.

Water is needed by every cell in our body in order to function properly. It is needed by every organ of the body, but in particular the kidneys in order to release toxins and waste products. Water is used to lubricate the joints, protect the spinal cord and other sensitive tissues, regulate body temperature and assist the passage of food through the intestines.

For most people, thirst is a very good indication that you need more water. Even before you become dehydrated, you'll feel thirsty, and your mouth may feel dry or sticky. After a while, you may also become lethargic and fuzzy-headed. Other signs include reduced urine output (and the urine is dark yellow). You might even notice your eyes look a bit sunken and feel dry.

Even a little dehydration can be a problem, so don't ignore those early signs. Even mild dehydration reduces your ability to think clearly and your physical coordination.

5 TIPS TO KEEP YOU HYDRATED IN THE SUMMER HEAT

1 Bookend your day with water. Drinking a glass of water as you wake up gets you started right. I generally drink 16 oz. of cool water first thing in the morning. Drinking warm water or herbal teas in the evening will keep you hydrated through the night and may help the body to rid itself of unwanted toxins.

2 Enjoy water-rich summer fruits and veggies. I love eating seasonal foods, and summer ripened fruits and veggies are perfect for keeping us hydrated. Enjoy plenty of cucumbers, melons, peaches, vine-ripe tomatoes, squash and bell peppers. Delicious!

3 Flavor water with fresh herbs. If you get tired of the taste of plain water, infuse it with fresh organic herbs, cucumber slices, lemon or lime. My favorites include watermelon basil and cucumber mint. Rinse, peel and thinly slice the fruit/veggies adding them to a half gallon mason jar or pitcher with cool water. For best flavor, it takes at least 4

hours or overnight in the refrigerator to let the flavors of the fruit infuse into the water. You can also add a pinch of sea salt to add electrolytes.

4 Drink before you eat. Sometimes when we are getting dehydrated we begin to feel weak and light headed. We may feel hungry when we actually need hydration. Unless you have diabetes and know your blood sugar is low, drink a glass of water before you eat a sugary snack (you can always eat fresh fruits and veggies) Also, when out at a restaurant, instead of filling up on bread, drink a glass of water while you are waiting for your meal.

Water...is needed by every organ in our body, but in particular, the kidneys in order to release toxins and waste products

5 Reduce your alcohol consumption. Summer is a great time for parties, and cold beer, wine coolers and rum punches are quite popular. Unfortunately alcohol decreases the body's production of anti-diuretic hormone, which is used by the body to reabsorb water. With less anti-diuretic hormone available, your body loses more fluid than normal through increased urination. Drink a glass of water before you start drinking alcohol and try to alternate alcoholic drinks with glasses of water. You will feel much better in the morning!

Staying cool and hydrated throughout these hot summer days may seem challenging, but by incorporating even a couple of these tips into your daily habits you and your family will have more energy and have more fun doing the activities you love. Prevention is always the best course of action to avoid dehydration. If you suspect more severe symptoms of dehydration in your child or an older adult compromised by other health conditions be sure to contact a health professional for appropriate treatment.

Robin Thomas worked for 25 years in Medical Research at UNC studying inflammation in chronic and autoimmune diseases. She left UNC to start her own well-ness business in 2004 and founded Living Well Connections, a community for people whose passion is healthy living, in 2015. Learn more at robinthomas.biz