

# NUTRIFAX<sup>©</sup>

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## Protein

Protein is an important nutrient and plays several roles in the proper function of the body. The word itself is from a Greek word meaning first. Protein is found in animal and plant sources. In the body, protein is a component of muscles, hair, skin, and nails.

Americans tend to eat too much protein. When too much protein is consumed, the body causes calcium to be lost, which can drain the bones of this essential mineral. Excess protein requires added water and other vitamins to metabolize it in the body. Research is being conducted regarding the relationship of protein to cancer and atherosclerosis.

**How much protein is enough?** The Recommended Dietary Allowance is .45 grams per pound of body weight. Generally, protein should provide about 15 percent of total calories.

**2000 calories per day x .15 = 300 calories of protein**

It is also important to try to balance the protein in your diet between animal and vegetable sources. Usually foods with animal protein are also high in fat.

Athletes often eat either too much protein or too little. People who are physically active have different nutritional needs, and research has not yet pinpointed the exact protein needs for athletes. See *NUTRIFAX: Nutrition and the student Athlete*.

**Food and Nutrition Services can assist in providing nutrition information. Call 703-813-4800 and ask for a Registered Dietitian.**

Vegetarians learn to combine vegetables with other plant proteins to make sure they get enough high-quality protein each day. Proteins in vegetables and other sources are called incomplete, and must be combined with other incomplete proteins to make them complete.

### Recommended Food Combinations To Make Complete Proteins

- Chickpeas & Hummus
- Tortilla & Beans
- Tofu & Sesame Seeds
- Cornbread & Beans
- Cereal & Milk
- Bread & Cheese
- Rice & Beans
- Pasta & Cheese

By using MyPyramid, one can make wise choices and stay at the 15 percent level of total calories.

