



HEALTH TIP OF THE WEEK

3/28: Animal vs. Plant Protein

Protein Introduction

Protein is far more than just a muscle builder. This powerful macronutrient also creates hormones and enzymes, is a major source of energy, aids in weight loss, and bolsters your immune system.

Animal proteins are complete proteins. This means they contain all the essential amino acids that you need in your diet. With a few exceptions, plant proteins are incomplete sources of protein.

Lately, more people are turning from animal-based proteins to those that come from plants.

There are benefits and concerns with both types of protein. What you actually need from protein are amino acids. You need 20 different ones. Your body makes some of them, but you must get nine from your diet. These are called essential amino acids since your body cannot make them on its own.

Complete proteins provide all nine essential amino acids. Sources of complete protein include:

- Dairy products
- Poultry
- Beef
- Pork
- Eggs
- Quinoa
- Whole sources of soy such as tofu, edamame, and tempeh



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Most plant sources of protein are incomplete. However, you can get the essential amino acids you need from plant foods, as long as you eat a variety of them. Sources of plant protein are:

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Whole grains
- Legumes such as beans, peas, and lentils
- Vegetables



Benefits of Plant Protein

Plant-based protein provides plenty of nutrients, fiber, and antioxidants that improve overall health. Getting more plants in your diet is always a great idea. Plant-based foods typically contain fiber, which promotes good gut bacteria, facilitates proper digestion, and blocks excessive carbohydrate and fat absorption.

Plant-based diets have been associated with significant reductions in blood pressure and cholesterol. Other benefits include:

- **Protection against heart disease**

A review of eight studies found that people who followed a vegan or vegetarian diet were 30% less likely to die from heart disease than people who ate meat. The reason? Plant protein usually contains lower levels of saturated fat and cholesterol than animal protein, which means decreased risk of cardiovascular disease.

- **Protection against cancer**

Eating a diet rich in plant foods decreases your risk of cancer. Phytochemicals are substances found in plants that may help prevent cancer.

- **Protection against type 2 diabetes**

People who follow plant-based diets have lower levels of type 2 diabetes than people who eat animal protein. People on plant-based diets are also less likely to be overweight. Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for diabetes.

Drawbacks about a plant-based protein

- Be aware that commercially prepared plant-based proteins are often heavily processed.
- In many cases, plant-based products simply can't compete with the high levels of animal products like beef or chicken. If you require a high protein diet, you may have to get strategic about planning your menu.
- Don't expect plant-based proteins to provide one-to-one levels of micronutrients with animal products. Many have lower amounts of B vitamins, iron, zinc, calcium, and vitamin D3. For further discussion of nutrients often lacking in a vegan diet, please refer to the health tip of 2/14/22.

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Benefits of Animal Protein

- From a purely biochemical standpoint, animal proteins are more bioavailable, meaning it's absorbed with greater efficiency.
- Plant protein is less efficiently absorbed (less bioavailable). That doesn't mean it's less healthy. It just means that when it comes to animal protein vs plant protein absorption, animal protein gets "more miles to the gallon".
- Because of its higher levels of amino acids and easier digestibility, complete animal protein is generally considered better than plant protein for building muscle.
- Animal proteins contain much higher concentrations of essential amino acids, which means you need to eat far less to meet your body's requirements.
- Diets that derive protein from fish, poultry and lean meat have been linked to lower rates of cognitive decline.



Drawbacks of Animal Protein

- Critics of animal protein tend to single out red meat, maintaining that it increases the risk of heart disease. Actually, the research on this subject is quite mixed. The real issue is not the protein, but rather the fat content in red meat. This is why it's so important to choose lean cuts of beef.

So, what is the bottom line? Should we get our protein from meat or from plants? No need to choose between the two. This should not be an either-or decision. It is best to not migrate to the extreme. You should incorporate BOTH forms of protein into your diet. Doing so will go a long way toward eating in a healthy, enjoyable and sustainable way.



Need some tips or more info on sources of plant and animal protein? Feel free to call our office.