

FEATURED TOPIC: PLANT-BASED PROTEINS

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Plant-based proteins is a topic I am often asked about in the cooking classes I offer. About 5% of Americans identify as vegetarians according to recent consumer surveys, with an increasing number of non-vegetarians replacing one to two meat-centric entrées per week with plant-based protein sources in order to increase the health factor of their meals.

No matter where one falls on the wide spectrum of dietary choices - from vegan and vegetarian to meat and seafood lovers - engaging in strategies that lower the risk of serious disease is definitely on the minds of many. Variety is key, and incorporating more plant-based proteins into our meals can provide a major win.

Why is it important?

Protein is an essential nutrient for keeping our immune systems and muscles strong. As we age, it is even more important since we tend to lose muscle mass. Although it is not necessary to solely eat plant-based proteins unless you wish to do so, plants are a great immune-boosting and muscle-building nutrient source and are known to lower disease-causing inflammation that can lead to heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Bonus!

Plus, from a cooking standpoint, shelf stable plant-based proteins such as dried or canned beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds are super versatile pantry staples. Generally budget-friendly, they work well alone, as well as complement each other in all sorts of recipes from appetizers to salads and sides to main courses and even desserts. Double bonus!

Now, you may wonder, “Can replacing one or two meat entrées per week with a plant-based protein truly make a difference to my health?” The short answer is yes! Our bodies benefit not only from the protein, but also the fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that plants offer and meat does not. As stated in “Mostly Plants - 101 Delicious Flexitarian Recipes from the Pollan Family” -

*“Replacing 3 percent of dietary protein from animal products with proteins from grains, vegetables or other plants reduces the risk of death regardless of any other unhealthy lifestyle choice . . .”**

How much protein do I need?

When planning meals, consider this - Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health recommends just over 7 grams of protein for every 20 pounds of body weight. For example,

- 125 pound person should consume about 45 grams of protein per day
- 140 pound person should consume about 50 grams of protein each day
- 200 pound person should consume about 70 grams per day

How much protein do plants offer?

Almost all plants provide some level of protein, with soy, beans, legumes and nuts generally having the most concentrated amounts. When incorporating plant-based proteins into menus, several ingredients containing protein are usually combined into the entree, versus one serving of meat as the centerpiece such as a bean salad with nuts and chopped veggies, or a soup with tofu, lentils or grains and vegetables.

For comparison sake,

- 1 cup chopped chicken = 38 grams of protein
- 4 ounces of beef = 28 - 35 grams of protein
- 1 large hard-boiled egg = 6 grams of protein

While many individual plants offer lower amounts of protein per serving than meat, selecting a variety when preparing meals makes meeting the recommended amount per day not only achievable but quite delicious.

Protein Amounts in Plant-Based Foods

FOOD ITEM	APPROXIMATE PROTEIN (rounded off)
Tempeh	34 grams per 1 cup
Tofu	21 grams per 1 cup
Buckwheat Groats	19 grams per 1 cup
Edamame	19 grams per 1 cup
Lentils	18 grams per 1 cup
Almonds	15 grams per ½ cup
Black Beans	14 grams per 1 cup
Chickpeas (cooked)	11 grams per 1 cup
Baked Potato (large)	8 grams
Peas	8 grams per 1 cup
Quinoa	8 grams per 1 cup
Peanut Butter	7 grams per 2 tablespoons
Pistachios	7 grams per ¼ cup
Red Kidney Beans	7 grams per ½ cup
Wild Rice	7 grams per 1 cup
Bulgur	6 grams per 1 cup
Oatmeal	6 grams per 1 cup
Millet	6 grams per 1 cup
Brown Rice	5 grams per 1 cup
Cashews	5 grams per 1 ounce
Coconut Milk (canned)	5 grams per 1 cup
Avocado	4 grams per 1 cup
Guava	4 grams per 1 cup
Walnuts	4 grams per ¼ cup
Hemp Seeds	3 1/3 grams per 1 tablespoon
Brussels Sprouts	3 grams per 1 cup
Jackfruit	3 grams per 1 cup
Kale (raw, chopped)	3 grams per 1 cup
Oat Milk	3 grams per 1 cup
Beets (diced)	2 ½ grams per 1 cup
Broccoli (raw, chopped)	2 ½ grams per 1 cup
Tahini Paste	2 ½ grams per 1 tablespoon
Apricots (dried)	2 grams per 1 cup
Blackberries	2 grams per 1 cup
Cauliflower (raw, chopped)	2 grams per 1 cup
Kiwi	2 grams per 1 cup
Mushrooms (raw, chopped)	2 grams per 1 cup
Super Greens (such as Olivia's brand)	2 grams per 2 cups
Sweet Potato (raw, diced)	2 grams per 1 cup
Butternut Squash (raw, diced)	1 ½ grams per 1 cup
Celery Root (raw, diced)	1 ½ grams per 1 cup
Chia Seeds	1 ½ grams per 1 tablespoon
Green Beans (raw, cut up)	1 ½ grams per 1 cup
Peaches (sliced)	1 ½ grams per 1 cup
Blueberries	1 gram per 1 cup
Carrot (raw, diced)	1 gram per 1 cup
Collard Greens (raw, chopped)	1 gram per 1 cup
Strawberries (sliced)	1 gram per 1 cup

7 Tips for Incorporating More Plant-Based Proteins into your Weekly Menus

- **Calendar it**
Designate one or two (or more) days per week to make a plant-based protein recipe for dinner. Start small, build over time.
- **Familiar is good**
Start with recipes that are familiar to you (like a favorite pasta, soup, chili or curry) and replace either all or half of the meat with beans, lentils and additional vegetables. Work toward adding less familiar recipes into circulation - one new recipe per week, every-other week or month.
- **Flip the ratio**
In many cuisines, meat takes a minor supporting role, mainly as a flavor component, with plants taking center stage. Try using small amounts of meat to simply flavor other sources of protein.
- **Expand the horizons**
Look beyond traditional uses for familiar foods such as using hummus as a pizza spread, potato topper, filling for tacos and quesadillas, or in a salad dressing. Blend chickpeas, tofu, edamame into smoothies along with fruit.
- **1 + 1 = Wonderful**
Think of one or two plant-based protein items to add a new twist to an old standard such as sprinkling nuts and seeds over stir fries, salads, fruit, soup, stew, chili or cooked grains. Or adding beans and/or whole grains to a soup, stew, or salad. You'd be surprised at how easy it is to amp up the protein level while adding new flavors, textures and variety.
- **Spice it up**
Plants and seasonings play well together! Particularly in cooked dishes, plants benefit from the addition of seasonings (think, herbs and spices) to enhance their wonderfulness and heighten flavor profiles.
- **Prep Ahead**
Dried beans, legumes and whole grains freeze well, so cook up a double batch either on the stove top or in a pressure cooker to have them at the ready. You'll be very happy!

To help you get started, try these delightful **plant-based protein recipes** from Love + Craft Kitchen. Careful, you'll get hooked!

- [Cashew Cheese Spread](#)
- [Roasted Squash Curry Bowl](#)
- [Multi-Grain Breakfast Porridge](#)

Reference:

* Pollan, Tracy. Mostly Plants. pp. 4-5. Harper Wave.