

## Vegetarian's Guide To A Protein Rich Diet



It doesn't matter if you choose to eat meat or not, or if you live an active or sedentary life, protein is an essential component in everyone's diet. In fact protein should make up about 35% of your diet.

Often when considering protein, our first thoughts are of meat. Yet there are many different forms of protein out there that are not only delicious and diverse, but also suitable for vegetarians, vegans and meat eaters alike!

### **What Makes Protein So Important?**

You may have noticed that there is a wide range of protein supplements available these days, in health food stores, gyms and even at your local supermarket. Products such as protein bars, powders, pre-packaged drinks and tablets are generally aimed at people who participate in a lot of exercise and sports that put their bodies under pressure to constantly rebuild and repair muscle tissue. It's not just the gym junkies though that need to consider this important nutrient in their diet. Without protein our bodies would no longer be able to perform its most basic bodily functions, such as cell growth and repair.

Protein is actually made up of strings of amino acids, and it is these amino acids that get used as the structural component, or building material, for our entire physical body. Many people often refer to these amino acids as the 'building blocks of life'. There are 20 different amino acids from which protein is formed. Our bodies are capable of producing many of these itself, however there are 9 essential amino acids that need to be gained from our diet.

Protein also has many other functions outside of developing and maintaining the structure of our body. It also plays a vital role in the transport and storage of atoms and molecules, the production of neurotransmitters required for sending information around your whole body and as a reserve energy supply.

## The Two Types Of Protein

When considering your diet it is important to remember that there are two types of proteins, those that contain all 9 essential amino acids (***complete proteins***), and those that only contain some of the 9 essential amino acids (***incomplete proteins***).

There is a common misconception that meat is the best source of protein available; however there are actually many complete protein choices available for vegetarians.

These include:

- Seitan
- Mycoprotein
- Chia
- Buckwheat
- Spirulina
- Quinoa

Some good news, for you vegetarians out there, is that by combining two or more incomplete protein sources together, you can gain all of the 9 essential amino acids you need to form complete protein!

Some of the incomplete protein sources include:

- Green Peas, chickpeas (and other legumes)
- Nuts as well as nut butters
- Seeds
- Beans

- Soy products (tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame etc)
- Leafy green vegetables
- Dark Chocolate (Just in case you need an excuse... Cocoa is a delicious source of protein!)

For vegetarians who don't mind animal products then there are several dairy options that are high in protein:

- Eggs
- Natural/Greek yogurt
- Cheeses (cottage cheese is a great source!)

### **The Best Ways To Combine Incomplete Proteins**

One of the best things about planning to ensure your diet contains all of the 9 essential amino acids you need, is that most incomplete protein sources perfectly complement each other!

Some excellent combinations, that provide you with all the protein you need, include:

- Hummus and pita bread
- Lentil dhal and rice
- Peanut butter on whole wheat toast
- Leafy green salad with chickpeas and a combination of nuts and seeds