

WELL | EAT

# How Much Protein Do We Need?

Ask Well

By SOPHIE EGAN    JULY 28, 2017

**Q. It seems that many people who are not elite athletes are now hyper-focused on protein consumption. How much protein does the average adult need to consume daily?**

**A.** The recommended intake for a healthy adult is 46 grams of protein a day for women and 56 grams for men. And while protein malnutrition is a problem for millions of people around the globe, for the average adult in developed countries, we are eating far more protein than we actually need.

Most American adults eat about 100 grams of protein per day, or roughly twice the recommended amount. Even on a vegan diet people can easily get 60 to 80 grams of protein throughout the day from foods like beans, legumes, nuts, broccoli and whole grains.

The Hartman Group, a consumer research firm that has been conducting a study of American food culture over the past 25 years and counting, has found that nearly 60 percent of Americans are now actively trying to increase their protein intake. Many are avoiding sugar and simple carbohydrates and turning to protein-rich foods, snacks and supplements. The firm calls protein “the new low-fat” or “the new low-carb,” even “the new everything when it comes to diet and energy.”

“Soccer moms feel they can’t be anywhere without protein,” says Melissa Abbott, the firm’s vice president for culinary insights. “Really it’s that we’ve been eating so many highly processed carbs for so long. Now it’s like you try nuts, or you try an egg again, or fat even” to feel full and help you “get through the day.”

In her research, Ms. Abbott said she always seems to be finding beef jerky in gym bags and purses, and protein bars in laptop bags or glove compartments. Many consumers, she notes, say they are afraid that without enough protein they will “crash,” similar to the fear of crashing, or “bonking,” among those who *are* elite athletes.

But most of us are getting more than enough protein. And few seem to be aware that there may be long-term risks of consuming too much protein, including a potential increased risk of kidney damage. To learn more, read “Can You Get Too Much Protein?”

*Sophie Egan is the author of the book “Devoured: How What We Eat Defines Who We Are,” recently released in paperback.*