

Protein Needs for Athletes

Athlete Scenario

I want to get stronger so I can perform better in the discus. My teammates and I have been reading about muscle-building protein in fitness magazines. To be honest, the more I read the more confused I get! How much and what type of protein should I be eating?

Determining Your Protein Needs

- The recommendations for athletes are 1.2–1.7 grams of protein per kilogram of body mass (.6-.8 g/lb), with athletes in rehabilitation, trying to lose fat mass, or aiming to increase lean body mass requiring up to 2.0 g/kg (.9 g/lb).
- To maximize muscle growth, consume around 20–30 grams of high quality protein (3-ounce chicken breast) after training and every 4 hours while you are awake.
- Eat within two hours after exercise to optimize muscle repair and growth.

Quality Matters:

- Animal-derived proteins (milk, eggs, meat and fish) are high quality because they have all of the essential amino acids (EAAs), which are building blocks for proteins in our body.
- Some plant-based proteins (soy, quinoa, amaranth, and buckwheat) contain all EAAs while most plant-based proteins (legumes, grains, nuts and seeds) are generally low in 1 or more EAAs. A variety of these foods must be consumed in your diet to provide all the EAAs.
- Milk is effective at stimulating muscle growth following training exercise. Consider drinking a glass of low-fat chocolate milk after a workout.

Protein-Rich Meals:

- Breakfast: Eggs with milk and oatmeal
- Lunch: Grilled chicken with vegetables and rice
- Dinner: Fish tacos with rice and black beans
- Snacks: Greek yogurt, string cheese, edamame, almonds, peanut butter and cottage cheese

Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs). A key to optimal recovery from your injury is developing a nutrition plan that meet the demands of your rehabilitation and busy schedule. **A SCAN registered dietitian (RD)** is the food and nutrition professional best qualified to help you design a nutrition plan tailored to your health and performance needs. Check with your athletic department or student health services or go to www.scandpg.org and click on Find a SCAN RD.



Tips to Take With You

1. Distribute protein intake evenly throughout the day by including high-quality proteins at meals and snacks.
2. Choose protein-rich foods (milk, eggs, meats and nuts) and limit the use of protein supplements for convenience and tolerance after exercise.
3. Remember, carbohydrate is the body's primary fuel so make sure you're eating enough carbohydrate (fruits, veggies, and grains).
4. A Sports dietitian nutritionist can help determine your individualized protein needs.

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