



Alton Sustainable Eating



Healthy Food, Healthy Planet

The lowdown on plant proteins – part 1 of 3

By Dee Panes, ACAN's consultant on Sustainable Eating

Most people equate protein with meat, seafood, eggs and cheese so they assume a plant-based diet is bound to be insufficient. However, all plants contain protein and all nine essential amino acids. For those deciding whether to adopt a well-planned plant-based diet, meeting or exceeding your protein needs is definitely achievable. But with all the advertisements promoting beef and other meats as if no other source of protein is as good, it is not surprising people are confused.

When considering switching from a traditional diet to one which is predominately plant based (*approx. 85% is recommended for health & environmental benefits*) or a diet that's 100% plant based, for those who choose it, people often have several questions they want answered FIRST, for instance:

1. **How much protein do I need?**
2. **What are the best sources of plant-based protein?**
3. **Is plant protein complete?**
4. **How can I ensure I get enough protein from plants?**
5. **Are there any potential nutritional deficiencies associated with plant-based diets?**

This post will address Q.1 & Q2. It's a "meaty" subject (no pun intended), so, a quick and short answer is not easy.

Read on ...

How much protein do I need?

Health authorities, such as the BDA (British Dietetic Association), NS (Nutrition Society), AfN (Association for Nutrition) and the NHS all agree that:

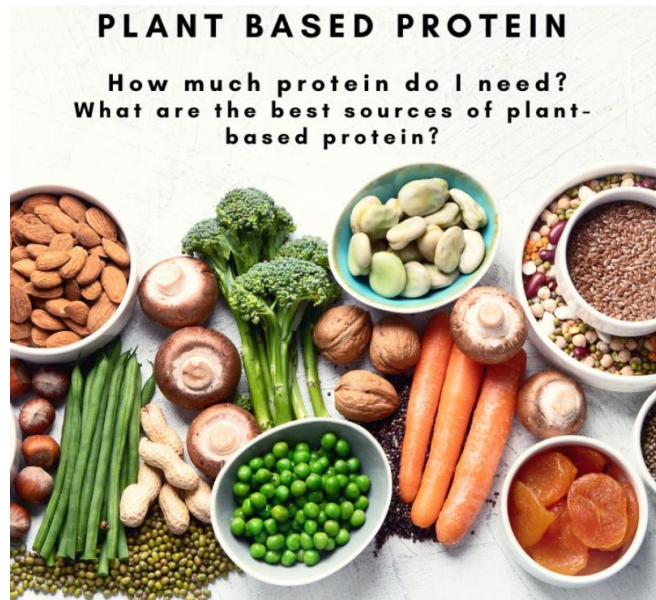
'a balanced plant-based diet can be enjoyed by children and adults, including during pregnancy and breastfeeding, if the nutritional intake is well-planned'.

The above statement and endorsement is incredibly helpful and reassuring. But it is worth noting, that *whatever* diet somebody chooses, it should be well planned!

A healthy plant-based diet should be based on a wide variety of whole foods and not mainly on ultra-processed foods (think vegan doughnuts, sausage rolls and ready meals) – just like any other diet.

In fact, many studies and a recent data analysis (of over 150,000 people) have suggested that a plant-based diet that emphasises minimally processed and unprocessed foods can help reduce the risk of developing several chronic health conditions such as type-2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, hypertension, obesity and even cardiovascular disease.

To understand your individual protein needs factors like age, sex, weight, activity level, pregnancy and lactation and health goals all need to be considered and many people may want to cross check their requirements with a registered dietitian or nutritionist. You can also seek guidance from The British Nutrition Foundation which has a table for reference (see references in our comments section for link to their guide).



In the UK, a daily intake of 0.75 g of protein per kilogram of body weight is recommended for adults. For example, a person weighing 60 kg requires a protein intake of about 45g per day. Some research indicates that vegans may require a higher protein intake because of the way our bodies handle plant proteins. A daily intake of 1 g per kilogram of body weight has been suggested. Regardless, any difference is minimal and easily obtained through a variety of plant-based foods and there are plenty to choose from.

Sources of plant-based protein?

There's a wide variety of plant-based foods that contain adequate amounts of protein. Plant protein sources are also filled with fibre, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants – plus they're naturally low in saturated fat and contain no cholesterol.

1. Legumes (e.g., kidney beans, pinto beans, cannellini beans, black beans, butter beans, fava beans, soybeans, dried peas, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, split peas), and numerous types and varieties of lentils (e.g., mung bean, red, green, yellow, black puy, beluga) and peanuts.
2. Tempeh (made from the soybean)
3. Tofu (various varieties to be had and made from the soybean)
4. Edamame beans (immature green soybeans)
5. Lupini beans
6. Whole wheat bread
7. Peanut butter
8. Nutritional yeast (a dairy-free food seasoning)
9. Almonds
9. Hemp seeds

10. Sunflower seeds
11. Rolled oats
12. Freekeh
13. Quinoa
14. Amaranth
15. Brown rice
16. Chia seeds
17. Green peas
- 18 Nuts (various types and varieties)
19. Seitan (a plant-based meat alternative made from hydrated gluten and used as a meat substitute for centuries in China and Japan, where it was developed by vegetarian Buddhist monks). N.B. Seitan is not the food for people with wheat allergies or gluten sensitivity, such as celiac disease.
- *20. TVP (textured vegetable protein)
- *21. Mycoprotein (such as the product and brand “Quorn)
- *22. Plant protein powder.

* Whilst these are technically processed foods, they can be part of a healthy diet, particularly for people who are highly active and are NOT the same as foods that are “ultra processed”, which are usually rich in saturated fats and refined sugars.

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