

Protein

Protein is a major component of what we eat and is part of a balanced diet. According to the USDA MyPlate diagram, protein should account for about a quarter of our food intake per meal.¹ With so many protein options available to us, it can be relatively easy to get enough protein each day.

It is important that we consume protein every day because it is what helps make up all of the different parts of our body, specifically our body tissues like muscles.² All proteins are made up of what are called amino acids.³ We require nine amino acids from our food, but the rest can be made in our bodies.³ A complete protein is a protein that has all of the amino acids that our bodies cannot make.⁴ It is important that we get all of these amino acids as part of our diet.³

There are two types of proteins that we can eat: animal-based and plant-based proteins. Between these two types of proteins, we can get all essential amino acids. Fruits, vegetables, and grains can also contribute a small amount of protein but are typically not the main source of protein in our diet.

Here are some examples of animal-based proteins:

- Meat
 - Beef
 - Pork
- Poultry
 - Chicken
 - Turkey
- Fish/Seafood
- Eggs
- Dairy
 - Milk
 - Yogurt
 - Cheese

Eating a plant-based diet has become more and more popular in the past few years. No matter what style of food you like to eat, plant-based proteins can have a spot in your meals. Plant-based proteins are typically less expensive than animal-based proteins, which makes them a great option for college students. They also add more fiber to help digestion and promote a healthy gut microbiome.

Here are some examples of plant-based proteins:

- Beans
- Lentils
- Soy Based Proteins
 - Tofu
 - Tempeh
 - Edamame
- Quinoa
- Nuts
- Seeds

Protein foods are also beneficial to us because they contain many vitamins and minerals.¹ Specifically, protein foods contain vitamin E and B vitamins, as well as zinc, magnesium, and iron.¹ By eating foods high in protein we are helping our bodies to continue functioning and to stay healthy.

Here are some tips for incorporating more protein into your diet:

- Add some peanut butter to your toast or oatmeal with breakfast.
- Add nuts or seeds to your salad.
- Prepare edamame as a quick appetizer or as a snack.
- Pack cheese and crackers for a quick on-the-go protein-packed snack.
- Prepare Greek yogurt with a nutty granola for a protein-filled breakfast.
- Meal prep your protein of choice at the beginning of the week to add to your meals throughout the week.
- Snack on beef or turkey jerky between classes.

Nutty Granola:



Ingredients:

- 0.5 cup Raw Walnuts
- 0.5 cup Raw Sliced Almonds
- 1 Cup Oats
- 0.25 cup Shredded Coconut
- 0.25 cup Peanut Butter
- 2 Tbsp Maple Syrup
- 1 tsp Vanilla

Directions:

1. Heat a frying pan on medium low heat.
2. Once hot, add in walnuts, almonds, coconut, and oats and toast until golden brown, stirring often. Remove the nut and oat mixture from the pan and pour into a medium sized mixing bowl.
3. Turn the heat to low. Add the peanut butter, maple syrup, and vanilla to the pan and heat until the mixture is a pourable consistency.
5. Mix in peanut butter mixture into the oat mixture.
6. Spread out on a cookie sheet pan and let harden for about 10-15 minutes.
7. Crumble the granola with your hands and serve.

Serving Size: 0.25 cup

Notes: This recipe can be paired with Greek yogurt and fruit for a protein-packed breakfast or snack. Any nuts or nut butters can be substituted in this recipe.

Sources:

1. What is MyPlate? MyPlate. <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>. Accessed November 10, 2022.
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3. Amino acids: Medlineplus medical encyclopedia. MedlinePlus. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002222.htm>. Accessed October 25, 2022.
4. Quinoa. The Nutrition Source. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/food-features/quinoa/>. Published July 6, 2021. Accessed October 25, 2022.