

[IMAGE]

How to Get More Protein in Your Diet

By Julie T. Chen, MD

There are a lot of patients in my clinic who prefer eating carbohydrates and sugars, I generally have to frequently remind them that a diet rich in vegetables and low saturated fat proteins are in general healthier for them. This concept can be hard for many patients.

I am a big fan of the vegetarian or vegan diet, but getting enough protein for them seems to be more difficult. So, while there are definitely healthy animal-based proteins available like fish, chicken breast and turkey breast, I am going to focus the three tips towards my vegetarian and vegan patients.

One way to get more protein in your diet is by eating nuts. I am a big fan of nuts. They are jam-packed full of vitamins and minerals and have healthy fats as opposed to the "bad fats." Despite them being phenomenal options for protein, if you eat massive amounts of anything, you will gain weight. So, keep portion size in mind as you munch on these yummy treats.

Another way to increase your protein intake is to eat legumes. Beans are great options for helping people feel full since there is fiber and protein in them. You can also use them in recipes to replace some of the processed starches you used to eat before you got healthy and decided to eat less processed starchy foods.

Finally, my last tip is a bit redundant but I think it needs to be said. For those who are allergic to animal dairy, plant-based dairy can be an option for calcium and protein. For example, there are a lot of nut-based or bean-based or grain-based dairies available on the market these days. The grain-based ones may not have as much protein so if you are looking for protein, aim for the nut-based ones more so than the other ones; although some of the bean-based ones have more protein than grain as well (such as soy has more than rice milk for example). So, if you can have animal dairy, then milk, yogurt and cheeses are fine from goat, sheep or cow's milk. But if you are vegan or vegetarian, you may want to try nut-based milks like almond or hazelnut milks, for example.

The main point to remember is that while animal proteins are an easier no-brainer version of getting proteins, even if you are vegan or vegetarian, you have protein options and that you should make an effort to eat more of that to help keep your blood sugar stable and your energy up.

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