Healthy Proteins: Alternatives to Meat

Protein is an important part of a diet: It helps to regulate energy, hormones, muscles, tissues and antibodies. Without adequate protein, individuals may feel lethargic and are more prone to disease. As an essential nutrient, protein cannot be stored and needs to be replenished daily.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends healthy adults take in approximately 0.4 grams of protein per day, per pound of body weight. This means a 130-pound person needs approximately 52 grams of protein; a 170-pound person needs 68 grams.

While lean meat is a good source of protein, there are other ways for people to get protein if they do not eat meat. The following offers simple ways to include protein in daily meals and snacks:

Breakfast:
- Peanut butter and whole-wheat bread
- Soy milk and shredded wheat
- Oatmeal (cooked)
- Vegetarian soy sausage

Lunch:
- Tofu or tempeh stir-fry
- Chickpeas and brown rice
- Lentil soup
- Black bean nachos with soy cheese
- Quinoa (rinsed and cooked)

Dinner:
- Whole-wheat pasta with vegetarian hamburger
- Baked potato with soy cottage cheese
- Vegetarian chicken nuggets and dipping sauce

Snack:
- Edamame and soy sauce
- Unsalted almonds
- Tahini and cut-up vegetables
- Soy yogurt

Finding the ingredients for meat-free, protein-filled meals is easier than ever with the growing popularity of vegetarian and soy products. Local health food or grocery stores should offer many of these products.

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