

Will I get enough nutrition without eating meat?

By Avadhutika Anandamitra Ac.



One of the worries people have when they think about adopting a vegetarian diet is, "Will I get enough nutrition if I don't eat meat? Will I get enough protein?" They have nothing to worry about: a vegetarian diet can provide all necessary body nutrients. In fact, many studies have shown that a vegetarian diet provides much more nutritional energy than a meat diet.

Of all the nutrients needed by our bodies, one of the most important is protein. Since most of our body tissues are formed of protein, it is necessary for growth and repair; it is also an important component in the hormones and enzyme systems in our body which direct and regulate many of the body's processes; and it is essential to build antibodies in the blood, to fight infection and disease. However, too much protein is harmful to health. Many people think that we need to eat a great deal of protein during the day, especially if we are active.

We have been conditioned – often by massive advertising campaigns – to believe that meat eating is essential for health. This is a great misconception. In fact, we need far less protein than we think we do, and recent medical research has proven that eating too much protein harms the liver and kidneys and is the cause of many diseases.

Millions of people in the wealthy industrialized nations who are consuming tremendous quantities of meat are actually eating 2 or 3 times the amount of protein they need. The excess is converted into carbohydrates and stored as fat. Astoundingly, over 50% of Americans are overweight and prone to many diseases directly related to obesity, especially high blood pressure and heart disease.

"Good" and "bad" proteins

Another great misconception is that vegetable protein is inferior to meat protein. In the 1950s scientists classified meat protein as "first class" and vegetable protein as "second class". However, this idea has since been completely disproved, because vegetable proteins have been found to be equally as effective and nutritious as meat proteins; now this distinction has been discarded. In fact, some vegetarian foods, such as the incredibly protein-rich soybean, have twice the amount of protein found in meat! (Soybeans are 40% protein, whereas even the leanest cut of beefsteak has only 20% usable protein.) Many nuts, seeds and beans contain 30% protein.

FOOD (100 grams)	Grams of protein
Soymilk (powdered)	41.8
Soybeans (dry)	31.4
Milk (powdered)	26.4
Peanuts	26.0
Beans	24.7
Beef	20.2
Chicken	18.6
Lamb	16.8

"Essential" amino acids and "complete proteins"

Proteins are constituted from smaller molecules called amino acids. When protein is ingested, it is broken down into its constituent amino acids, which are then utilized individually or reassembled into the various types of protein the body needs. There are about 22 amino acid, of which all but eight so-called "essential amino acids" can normally be synthesized in the body. If any one of these eight amino acids is missing, the others

cannot be utilized; thus all of the eight essential amino acids have to be present at the same meal. These eight essential amino acids must also be present in certain proportions; if the proper proportion of even one is lacking, the remaining amino acids are correspondingly reduced, and consequently the body receives less available protein for its use.

Foods or food combinations providing all the essential amino acids in the requisite proportions are said to contain a complete protein. Meat is not the only complete protein, and in fact many meats lack one or more of the essential amino acids. Soybeans and milk are also complete proteins; and combining several foods makes a high quality food that far surpasses the protein value of either food alone.

The following food combinations have been found by nutrition experts to produce complete proteins:

- MILK with rice, wheat, sesame, beans, or potatoes
- BEANS with rice, wheat, corn, nuts, or sesame seeds
- PEANUTS with rice, wheat, nuts or oats
- SOYBEANS with wheat, corn, or sesame
- VEGETABLES with rice or any other grain, or sesame.

Rural people everywhere in the world seem to "complement" their proteins instinctively, for instance by mixing rice and tofu (as in China) or corn and beans (as in Central and South America).

In 1972 Dr Frederick Stare of Harvard University (USA) conducted a comprehensive study of vegetarians (including adult men and women, pregnant women, and adolescent girls and boys). He found that all groups were consuming over twice their minimum daily protein requirement. Even back in 1954 scientists conducted a detailed study at Harvard and found that when a variety of vegetable, grain and dairy products were eaten in ANY combination, there was always more than enough protein; they were unable to find a protein deficiency no matter what combinations were used. The scientists concluded that it is very difficult to eat a varied vegetarian diet, which will not easily meet all protein requirements for the human body. (The scientists stated that: "A reasonably chosen plant diet, supplemented with a fair amount of dairy products, is adequate for every nutritional requirements of all age groups.")

In newspapers we sometimes read about malnourished people in poor countries who are starving and dying from "protein deficiency", and we often blame this on their vegetarian diet. But scientists have found that these people are undernourished not because they are not eating meat, but because they are not eating enough food. A diet of rice only (and very little of that) or sweet potatoes only, naturally leads to malnutrition and early death. By contrast, anywhere in this world that one can find people on a vegetarian diet with an adequate caloric intake and an adequate variety of vegetables, grains and legumes, there, one will find strong, healthy, and thriving people.

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