

Is it time to revisit the current protein recommendations?

June 17 2008

Current protein recommendations were established with the goal of preventing deficiency, but newer research indicates that many adults may benefit from eating more than the minimum requirement. These findings are presented in a supplement in the May issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* describing the conclusions of a Protein Summit held last spring, which brought together the world's leading scientists in protein research.

The summit's attendees report in the supplement that eating a higher protein diet - still within the recommended range, but toward the top of it - may play a role in optimal health, as higher protein diets are linked with a lower risk for many health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis as well as sarcopenia, the degenerative loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength.

The current U.S. recommendation according to the Institute of Medicine is that adults should consume between ten and 35 percent of their calories from protein. The summit participants said that many adults, such as those who are overweight or obese and older Americans may benefit from eating up to 35 percent of their calories from protein.

The summit's conclusions complement examination of evidence by the International Dietary Energy Consultancy Group (IDECG), World Health Organization/Food and Agricultural Organization and Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) panel, which has determined that there is either a benefit or no harm with protein intakes three to four times the

minimum requirement. This means that adults can safely eat up to 35 percent of their total calories as protein, and there may be some health benefits in doing so. Since most Americans are consuming protein in the lower end of this range (about 13-16 percent), there is room for adding more high-quality protein to their diets while still being in the recommended range outlined as safe.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans do not specifically address protein as a required nutrient, and summit participants agreed that greater focus and attention to protein should be given in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines in light of grounded science supporting protein's role in disease prevention and emerging research supporting its role in optimal health.

How to Get More Protein - and the Best Kind

Protein supports growth and repair of muscle, bone and other body tissues and can help to promote satiety. While looking for protein choices, it's important to know that animal sources of protein, such as dairy, meat, eggs, poultry and fish, are defined as high-quality or "complete" proteins because they contain the right proportion of amino acids essential for the body's functioning. One easy way to increase protein intake - and high-quality protein intake at that - is to eat the recommended 3 servings or more of dairy products like milk, cheese or yogurt each day.

"Taking simple steps such as choosing a glass of low-fat or fat-free milk at a meal, or eating a piece of low-fat cheese with fruit as a snack, will help increase protein in the diet which may lead to a reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis." said Greg Miller, Ph.D., M.A.C.N., executive vice president of research, regulatory and scientific affairs at the National Dairy Council® and Protein Summit participant.

In addition to protein, nutrient-rich dairy foods contain eight other essential nutrients including calcium, potassium, phosphorus, vitamins A, D and B12, riboflavin and niacin (niacin equivalents). The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends 3 servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products each day and recognize that people who consume more dairy foods have better overall diets, consume more nutrients and have improved bone health. Additionally, the U.S. Surgeon General recommends consuming 3 daily servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy foods, and the National Medical Association and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend consuming 3 to 4 daily servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy foods.

Source: Edelman Public Relations

Citation: Is it time to revisit the current protein recommendations? (2008, June 17) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-06-revisit-current-protein.html>

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