



IS MY CHILD GETTING ENOUGH PROTEIN

BY: Ntsako Mathye / DATE: February 2019

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: FEBRUARY 2022

With obesity on the increase many parents are very careful to watch the amount carbs or fat their children are eating. But parents are ignoring a big macro nutrient that if goes unchecked, can have a major impact on the nutrition of their little one. This nutrient is protein

WHAT IS PROTEIN?

Protein is one of the three macronutrients that the body needs. Protein is important for the body to grow and repair itself. Proteins are made of amino acids which function as “building blocks” for cells in the body. Proteins build a child's body cells and help fight infection by strengthening the immune system¹.

TOO LITTLE OR TOO MUCH

Too little or too much protein can lead to negative consequences:

- Too little protein: may lead to malnutrition which results from not getting enough protein, calories or micronutrients. It leads to low weight-for-height (wasting), height-for-age (stunting) and weight-for-age (underweight)².
- Too much protein: may lead to weight gain or increased cholesterol levels as well as renal health issues in people with pre-existing renal disease⁶.

CAN PROTEIN REALLY BE TOO MUCH?

We think of protein as a good nutrient so how can you possibly have too much. Well just like how we manage how many carbohydrates we eat, the same principle goes for protein.

Too much protein can lead to weight gain. Scientific research has shown that toddlers who consume too much protein were at greater risk of developing obesity later in life. A study on “Dietary Intake of Protein in Early Childhood” found that a higher intake of protein, at age 1 year was associated with a greater height, weight, and BMI in childhood up to 9 years of age. Most of this extra weight was purely fat, rather than other body mass such as muscles or bones³.

Other dangers of excess protein are that protein breaks down to amino acids and produces waste products that are removed by the kidneys. This is associated with renal health issues in people with pre-existing renal dysfunction⁶. Too much protein can lead to increased water loss and therefore dehydration⁴.



HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) recommendations are that a maximum of 15 percent of all energy should come from protein for children from 6 to 24 months. This translates to 30 to 45 grams per day, depending on your child's energy needs⁵.

That sounds complicated. To make it easier it's about 13 grams per day for toddlers aged 1 to 3 years. Children aged 4 to 9 years need 19 grams of protein each day. Those between the ages of 9 and 13 need 34 grams. As you can see, protein needs increase by age⁵.

WHAT FOODS SHOULD I BE GIVING?

The same foods that adults eat for protein are the same to be given to toddlers but in much smaller quantities. High protein foods such as lean meat (fish and poultry), dairy, grains and plant proteins (beans, lentils and other legumes). Other sources also include peanut butter and nuts and seeds¹.

Here are some examples of amounts of food that contain an average of 7g of protein.

- One egg
- 1 cup of milk or yoghurt
- A 30g piece of meat
- ½ cup of dry beans/lentils^{5,6}

Protein fortified low sugar cereals can be a great way to get in protein especially for the fussy eater who does not like chewing. FUTURELIFE® Tots is a toddler maize-based cereal with added milk powder to be an appropriate addition for toddlers 1+ years of age (13 – 36 months). It mixes instantly with pre-boiled and cooled water or milk and can be enjoyed as a delicious meal or snack anytime of the day. FUTURELIFE® Tots contains 3.5g of protein per 25g recommended serving size.

CONCLUSION

It's important to make sure your little one gets adequate protein for optimal growth. Protein quality is just as important as quantity. Be aware of what the correct amount of protein looks like for your little one and you can be sure they will receive a healthy, balanced diet to assist them in proper growth and development.



REFERENCES:

1. Kathleen Mahan (Author), Sylvia Escott-Stump (Author) Krause's Food, Nutrition and Diet Therapy 11th Edition Chapter 10. Nutrition in childhood
2. <https://www.who.int/features/qa/malnutrition/en/>
3. Kim VE Braun, Nicole S Erler, Jessica C Kieffe-de Jong, Vincent WV Jaddoe, Edith H van den Hooven, Oscar H Franco, Trudy Voortman; Dietary Intake of Protein in Early Childhood Is Associated with Growth Trajectories between 1 and 9 Years of Age, *The Journal of Nutrition*, Volume 146, Issue 11, 1 November 2016, Pages 2361–2367, <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.116.237164>
4. Delimaris, Ioannis. (2013). Adverse Effects Associated with Protein Intake above the Recommended Dietary Allowance for Adults. *ISRN Nutrition*. 2013. 10.5402/2013/126929.
5. <https://dtk.ucsf.edu/pdfs/FoodLists.pdf>
6. <https://jissn.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12970-017-0177-8>