

Eat to Compete“If I eat more protein, will my performance improve?”

Karen Armstrong RD

Protein is essential for growth, and to maintain and repair muscles. Our main sources of protein are found in the Meats & Alternates group in Canada's Food Guide. This group includes animal sources such as poultry, eggs, fish, and red meats, as well as vegetable sources like nuts, tofu, lentils and beans. You'll also find foods containing protein in the Milk & Alternates group (milk, cheese, yogurt).

If you're not getting the minimum number of servings from the Meats & Alternates, and the Milk & Alternates, you're not getting enough protein, or iron, calcium, and zinc. This is often the case for teenage girls, and women. If you boost your servings into the recommended range, you'll probably notice a difference in your ability to train, and recover from training. The improvement has more to do with simply eating better, rather than specifically eating more protein.

If you're getting the recommended servings from all food groups, chances are pretty good that you're already meeting your body's protein needs. In this situation, adding more protein isn't necessarily better. Adding extra protein adds extra calories. If you aren't burning these extra calories, they'll be stored as fat and your weight will creep up. If you're adding extra protein to build muscle, keep in mind there's a limit to the conversion of protein to muscle. Once you've reached the limit, adding more protein does not equal more muscle.

Protein foods or protein powder

Food wins every time. Protein foods supply more than just protein. Choose poultry, red meat, and eggs and you'll also get B vitamins and minerals like iron and zinc. Nuts, like almonds, supply good fats. Lentils and beans are great fibre sources. Plus, buying protein foods is far easier on your wallet than buying protein powders. And protein foods usually taste better.

Karen Armstrong is a Registered Dietitian with Manitoba Chicken Producers. She's an age group triathlete, recreational skier and parent of a competitive swimmer. Karen can be reached at karmstrong@chicken.mb.ca

Manitoba Chicken Producers represents 143 farm families raising chickens that are free-run, grain-fed and free of added hormones. For more information on buying locally grown chicken, visit the Buying Guide at www.chicken.mb.ca