

CHAPTER FOUR

BUT WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR PROTEIN?

This is a question with which both vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike have a shared obsession. This obsession is largely based on misconceptions and misinformation, pure and simple. It reminds me of the following quote my husband shared with me:

“A misconception remains a misconception even when it is shared by a majority of the people.” – Author Unknown

What would you say if I told you that on any given day, my family gets more protein than yours? I’m sure that you’d find that hard to believe, but trust me, by the time you finish this chapter you will see what I mean. Not only *more* protein, but *better* protein. What exactly do I mean by *better* protein? Before I explain this, let’s take a look at how much protein you actually need. According to the federal guideline for Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA), the average person needs approximately 0.36 grams of protein for every pound of body weight. For vegetarians, this requirement is increased to 0.45 grams for every pound of body weight. Let’s look at the following illustration:

Non-vegetarian Protein Requirement for 195 lb. person:

$$195 \text{ pounds} \times 0.36 \text{ grams} = 70 \text{ grams of protein per day}$$

Vegetarian Protein Requirement for 195 lb. person:

$$195 \text{ pounds} \times 0.45 \text{ grams} = 88 \text{ grams of protein per day}$$

Why do vegetarians need more protein on a daily basis than non-vegetarians? The difference has to do with animal based protein vs. plant based protein. Plant based protein is more easily digestible and assimilates in your system faster. They are, however lower in certain amino acids so you have to consume more plant based protein than animal based protein to get the same amount of those amino acids. The most startling positive difference

that should be noted is that vegan proteins (most of the products in Chapter Six are vegan) are *completely free* of cholesterol and uric acid which are two components widely linked to chronic diseases.

An interesting fact about the amount of protein that is recommended for vegetarians is that it is nearly identical to the amount that is recommended for body building according to Arnold Schwarzenegger. In the book he wrote during his body building days, *Arnold's Body Building for Men*, he states the following:

"Kids nowadays....tend to go overboard when they discover body building and eat diets consisting of 50 to 70% protein – something that I believe to be totally unnecessary....(In) my formula for basic good eating: eat about one gram of protein for every two pounds of body weight."¹

In 2003 a comprehensive study conducted by the American Dietetic Association (ADA) concluded that a vegetarian based diet was as sufficient in nutrients as an animal based diet, and was actually healthier in all major categories. For example, did you know that consuming an excess amount of animal protein can actually lead to symptoms associated with kidney disease and osteoporosis? Too much animal protein can leech your bones of calcium, thus resulting in osteoporosis. In addition, if the body takes in more animal protein than it needs, the excess can be deposited into the kidneys and can lead to kidney disease.

This study also noted that vegetarians had lower rates of cardiovascular disease primarily due to the fact that non-animal foods are completely free of cholesterol, the leading cause of heart disease. Vegetarians also have lower rates of colon cancer because they do not eat meat. According to the ADA, both red and white meats have been independently linked to an increased risk of colon cancer. In addition, excess consumption of dairy products and calcium have been linked to an increased risk for prostate cancer. The list just keeps going and going. The ADA also found that vegetarians are half as likely to suffer from gallstones, rheumatoid arthritis, and even dementia (Alzheimer's disease), all of which have been linked to meat based diets. And, before you abandon meat and chicken and run out and stock up on fish, you may find it interesting to know that like meat, fish is a high cholesterol food and fish protein also supports the growth of cancer because it assists with the slow, steady buildup of heart-destroying plaque in your arteries. As if this is not bad enough, fish have another unique ingredient which is an equal cause for concern; mercury. Mercury in food has been linked to a variety of neurological disorders and is a highly toxic substance that can easily penetrate our cells. Michael O. Leavitt, the past director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that fish, in almost all the lakes and rivers across our nation, were contaminated with mercury. Consequently, forty-four states have announced mercury advisories for pregnant women in the 2004 – 2005 timeframe². Finally, it should be noted that *all* sources of animal protein (including fish and eggs) contain cholesterol and have little or no fiber. *No* sources of plant protein contain cholesterol and most have substantial amounts of fiber, since

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plants are primarily fibrous foods. According to the American Heart Association, (Americanheart.org) two of the most important factors for lowering your risk of heart disease, in addition to maintaining a healthy weight, are to reduce your cholesterol intake (to less than 200mg/day) and increase your fiber intake (at least 25 – 30g/day).

So, now can you see why I consider vegetarian protein a *better* protein? The next step is to look at the amount of protein my family actually gets. I am going to present a side-by-side dietary comparison of a typical day, using my son as an example, as compared to the average teenage boy’s diet. Since my son is highly athletic and needs a lot of calories and nutrients to maintain and even increase his body weight, this example will illustrate how you can provide for even the most demanding physical needs based upon a vegetarian diet. Also note that my son is a freshman in college and does not have access to a full service kitchen. Most everything he eats is prepared, by him, right in his dorm room. He does not have a lot of free time since classes and basketball practice keep him busy, so if he is able to do this, surely you can too!

NOTE: In the following example, if the amount of calories consumed by my son scares you, just remember that he is still growing and works out at least two times per day. Personally, I eat about ¼ as much food as he does. I use him as an example primarily to do away with the misconception that a vegetarian diet is not sufficient for growing teenagers and athletes. As you can see, my son falls into both of these categories. Also, if you feel that the non-vegetarian diet in this example is too heavily slanted on the fast food side, I would recommend that you hang out with a young man for about a week, especially one that normally does not have access to home-cooked food, like a college student. Trust me, in this analysis, I have been kind. I even threw in a salad for the non-vegetarian example, which, honestly, I cannot remember the last time I saw one of my son’s friends eat a salad. Also notice that there is no soda, Red Bull® potato chips, candy, etc. in the non-vegetarian example. We all know these “foods”, if you can call them that, are full of empty calories but unfortunately are staples in the average teenage diet. Another thing to note that is not reflected here is that my son drinks over 1 gallon of water a day, and has absolutely no soda or drinks with processed sugar. Occasionally, he will have a fruit smoothie or a glass of orange juice, but for the most part he drinks only water. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of drinking water for internal cleansing and proper hydration, especially for athletes. It’s not that my son is some sort of nutrition nut or is freakishly disciplined; it’s just simply a way of life for us and requires little or no extra discipline on our part.

TABLE ONE - 19 year old Vegetarian Male, 195 lbs, Protein RDA: 88 grams (g)/day

Meal		Cal	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Choles (mg)	Fiber (g)
Breakfast	Oatmeal (2 cups)with nuts, raisins, flax oil	788	25	20	0	27
	8oz of Silk [®] Unsweetened Soy Milk	80	7	4	0	1
Lunch	Spinach Pizza with (2) vegan sausages*	1,470	94	62	45	22
Snack	Two Vegan Boca Burgers [®] on Buns	460	38	8	0	14
Dinner	Fried Chic-ketts [®] cooked in olive oil (6oz)	715	48	35	0	12
	Sweet Potato Fries cooked in olive oil	558	2	39	0	7
	Spinach and Tomato Salad with dressing	220	3	14	0	3
TOTAL		4,291	217	182	45	86

* Amy's Kitchen[®] Spinach Pizza and Tofurky[®] Italian Sausages. See Chapter Seven for details.

TABLE TWO - 19 year old non-vegetarian Male, 195 lbs, Protein RDA: 70 grams (g)/day

Meal		Cal	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Choles (mg)	Fiber (g)
Breakfast	McDonald's Egg McMuffin [®]	300	17	12	230	2
	Small Orange Juice (12 oz)	140	2	0	0	0
Lunch	Pizza Hut 6" Sausage Lover's [®] Pizza	850	37	47	100	5
Snack	Two McDonald's Hamburgers	520	26	18	60	2
Dinner	Chicken McNuggets [®] (10pc = 5.6oz)	420	25	24	60	0
	McDonald's Large French Fries	570	6	30	0	7
	McDonald's Side Salad with Dressing	210	3	18	20	1
TOTAL		3,010	116	149	470	17

Summary:

- The vegetarian diet actually provided **101 grams more protein** than the non-vegetarian diet. Since this is plant based protein, there are no harmful by-products, unlike animal based protein
- The vegetarian diet has 1,281 more calories and 33 more grams of fat than the non-vegetarian diet. This is extremely important for athletes and growing teens that need more quality calories and more fat to fuel their bodies. The vegetarian fat has **less than 10% saturated fat (harmful fat)** yet the non-vegetarian diet is more than 30% saturated fat
- The vegetarian diet has **only 45 grams of cholesterol as compared to a whopping 470 grams** for the non-vegetarian diet. The only cholesterol in the vegetarian diet comes from the cheese on the pizza. The non-vegetarian diet has over twice the RDA of cholesterol as recommended by the American Heart Association. This puts the average teen who consumes fast food at high risk for developing heart disease later in life.

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- The vegetarian diet has **86 grams of fiber** as compared to the **17 grams** in the non-vegetarian diet. This is four times the amount recommended by the American Heart Association for the vegetarian diet (the more the better), but only slightly more than half the amount for the non-vegetarian diet

Just for fun, let’s compare a few other mainstays in the typical American diet with their vegetarian (actually vegan) counterparts. These vegan meat substitutes can be found in most major grocery stores and are products that I use on a daily basis:

Description	Amt	Cal	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Choles (mg)	Fiber (g)
Ground Beef Crumbles, 80% lean, cooked	1 oz	77	8	5	25	0
Boca Burger® Crumbles	1 oz	29	6.3	0.25	0	1.5
Ground Beef Patty, 80% lean, broiled	1 oz	77	7	5	26	0
Boca Burger® Vegan patty, cooked	1 oz	39	5	1	0	1.5
Chicken Breast, raw	1 oz	31	7	0	16	0
Worthington Chic-ketts®, uncooked	1 oz	56	7	2.5	0	1
White Wave Chicken Style Wheat Meat®	1 oz	43	8	0	0	1
Ball Park Franks® Hot Dog	1 dog	180	6	16	40	0
Smart Dogs® Jumbo Vegan Hot Dog	1 dog	59	13	0	0	1

See a pattern here? In every case, the vegan meat substitutes have comparable and in some cases even *more* protein than the meats from animal sources. In most cases, the calories in the vegan products are less, and in every case the animal based protein had significant levels of cholesterol as compared to **zero cholesterol** in the vegan cases. Finally, none of the animal based protein had any fiber, as compared to each vegan protein which had at least 1 gram of fiber.

Based upon the information presented in this chapter, even the staunchest skeptic would have to concede that the vegetarian diet is healthier and completely adequate on every level, whether for a 44 year old woman such as myself, or for my 19 year old son who has been a vegetarian since birth. This is a real example, based upon foods that my entire family eats on a regular basis. If you cannot see the value in switching to a vegetarian diet, then just be honest with yourself; you simply don’t want to see it. And that’s OK. The purpose of this book is not to try to convince anyone of anything. I simply want to share information and ideas with those who are interested. To me, it’s sort of like people who continue to smoke. There is absolutely no doubt that smoking is hazardous to your health yet people continue to do it. This is one of the freedoms we enjoy in this country. No one dictates what you can or cannot put into your body – it’s your choice. Based upon science, research, and my own personal

experience, there is no doubt that consuming an animal based diet is also hazardous to your health, yet you may decide to continue to do it. Again, that is your choice and I respect that. This book is for those of you who feel the need to change and don't know where or how to start. In my family's case, the choice was simple. Think about it - what do you have if you don't have your health? I'm not just talking about the possibility of living longer, because I am of the belief that when your number is called, there is nothing you can do about it. But I do believe we can control the *quality* of our life, if not the *quantity*. I want to live everyday to the fullest, and not be hindered by my body or my health due to factors that were within my control.

So, now that I have answered the question "where do you get your protein?" let me ask you the same thing, "Where do you get *your* protein?"

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