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## 6 Sneaky Ways to Get More Protein Without Meat



There are plenty of misconceptions about vegetarians and vegans — and I should know. My family consists of one vegan, three carnivores, and me, a “flexitarian” who’s mostly vegetarian but occasionally eats chicken or fish. Because we don’t always eat meat, my family has been the subject of many of the misunderstandings about vegetarians — especially the idea that it’s impossible to get enough protein while eating a meatless diet. People have even mentioned to me that vegetarians can’t build muscle like meat eaters because they are protein-deficient. In truth, vegetarians can certainly get enough protein (and muscle!) in their diets, especially with a little planning. Meat-abstainers and carnivores alike can sneak more protein into meals by following these easy six strategies throughout the day. Also be sure to check out my recipes for [Spicy Black Bean Burgers](#) and [Hummus](#), below!

### Six Ways to Incorporate More Protein Into Your Day

**Diversify protein sources.** Meat is certainly not the only protein source out there. There’s protein to be found in nuts, seeds, beans, and legumes — and even produce! Legumes (such as peas and lentils) and beans offer a flavorful, inexpensive, and protein-rich alternative to meat. If you eat dairy, there’s a lot of protein in eggs, yogurt, and low-fat milks and cheeses. One of my favorite treats is six ounces of Greek yogurt with two tablespoons raw almonds — for a total of more than 20 grams of protein. Perhaps surprisingly, vegetables and fruits can also be a source of protein: For example, one cup of cooked spinach has 4.7 grams!

**Incorporate protein into side dishes.** When people think of protein, they often think of main dishes such as eggs, meat, or fish. But it’s possible to get a big percentage of your protein needs from side dishes by using beans, legumes, and grains (and even greens, as mentioned above). In my family, we whip up a batch or two of hummus

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## 6 Sneaky Ways to Get More Protein Without Meat



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### Six Ways to Incorporate More Protein Into Your Day

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**Incorporate protein into side dishes.** When people think protein, they often think of main dishes such as eggs, meat, or fish. But it’s possible to get a big percentage of your daily protein needs from side dishes by using beans, legumes, and grains (and even greens, as mentioned above!). In my family, we whip up a batch or two of hummus every week and regularly make black bean burgers (check out the recipes below!). Also popular at my house is quinoa, a gluten free grain loaded with fiber and about six grams of protein per serving. Use it to accompany stir fries and add it to salads for an extra dose of protein. With a little planning, it’s easy to incorporate protein into all parts of a meal.

**Use substitutes in meat-based dishes.** In moderation, soy products can serve as healthy alternatives to meat. I recommend that people avoid Genetically Modified varieties (check the labeling to figure out if a product is GMO free), though the verdict is still out on whether they pose a human health risk. Genetically modified soy consumption has been shown to have negative health effects in animal-based studies, but traditionally fermented soy products like tofu and tempeh are generally considered healthy for humans in reasonable quantities. Two of my favorite options are tempeh and seitan. Tempeh is made from fermented soybeans and mixed with grains like rice or barley; thanks to the grains, it has a nutty flavor and firm texture. Seitan is made from wheat protein. It's chewy and dense and often used in dishes as mock meat. Tofu, tempeh, and seitan should all be available at most grocery stores.

**Make some protein shakes.** Shakes are another good protein option, especially post-workout: Studies suggest that eating protein within 30 minutes to two hours after a workout helps repair muscles and even prevent muscle soreness. My personal favorite is whey protein (a dairy product and one of the most common protein powders available), which is an effective protein source for muscle recovery. Just add whey protein to any smoothie recipe and enjoy it as a meal replacement or snack. Don't eat dairy? No problem. There are many dairy-free protein powders made from hemp, brown rice, and pea protein.

**Don't overdo it on the carbs.** Too often, when people give up meat they end up eating more carbohydrates and not-so-healthy snacks in order to feel full. But a diet high in simple carbohydrates (such as white bread or pasta) can cause spikes and drops in blood sugar, which leads to hunger and cravings. Don't rely solely on simple carbs to fill you up. Instead, choose high-fiber carbohydrates (such as whole grains, vegetables, berries, and nuts) and be sure to pair them with at least some protein at each snack or meal.

**Get sneaky.** Look for recipes that can include kidney beans, chickpeas, quinoa, lentils, nuts, and/or low-fat dairy products — either as substitutions or as add-ins, even if they're not used in the original recipe — and incorporate these ingredients whenever possible. Some other sneaky tips? Snack on foods like trail mix and sunflower seeds. Add nuts and seeds to salads, stir fries, and other dishes. One of my favorite tricks is to add protein powder to morning oatmeal.

If you're thinking about switching to a vegetarian or vegan diet (or you simply want to eat less meat), know that you can do so without needing to worry about whether you're getting enough protein. With some simple meal planning, it's easy to get all the protein you need.