

NUTRITION REFERENCE

The Plant Protein Reference

What's actually in a serving, and how to hit your number without thinking about it.

01 Start with your number

Protein targets get quoted as one universal figure. They aren't one figure. Find the row that describes you:

YOU ARE	TARGET PER DAY
A generally healthy adult, not training much	0.8–1.0 g / kg
Active, lifting, or over 50	1.2–1.6 g / kg
Training for an endurance event	1.2–1.4 g / kg
Building muscle deliberately	1.6–2.0 g / kg

In pounds: divide your weight by 2.2 to get kilograms. A 180 lb person is about 82 kg — so 1.2 g/kg is roughly 98 g of protein a day.

One adjustment for plant eaters: plant protein is digested slightly less efficiently than animal protein. Adding about 10% to your target covers the difference. It's a rounding adjustment, not a crisis.

The 0.8 g/kg figure you've seen quoted is the RDA — the amount set to prevent deficiency in most people, not the amount that's optimal if you're active. That distinction gets lost constantly.

02 What's actually in a serving

Most protein charts list grams per 100 g. Nobody eats 100 g of anything. These are real servings.

LEGUMES – THE FOUNDATION

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN
Lentils, cooked	1 cup	~18 g
Edamame, shelled, cooked	1 cup	~18 g
Black beans, cooked	1 cup	~15 g
Chickpeas, cooked	1 cup	~15 g
Green peas, cooked	1 cup	~8 g

SOY AND WHEAT PROTEIN – THE HEAVY HITTERS

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN
Seitan	100 g	~21–25 g
Tempeh	100 g	~19 g
Tofu, firm	100 g (about ½ block)	~15–18 g
Soy milk, unsweetened	1 cup	~7–8 g

Tofu and seitan vary a lot between brands. Check the label once and you'll know your usual.

NUTS AND SEEDS – PROTEIN PLUS FAT

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN
Hemp seeds	3 tbsp	~10 g
Pumpkin seeds	1 oz	~8–9 g
Peanut butter	2 tbsp	~7–8 g
Almonds	1 oz (about 23)	~6 g
Chia seeds	2 tbsp	~4–5 g

GRAINS AND THE QUIET CONTRIBUTORS

These are the ones people forget. They add up to a surprising share of the day's total.

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN
Quinoa, cooked	1 cup	~8 g
Whole wheat pasta, cooked	1 cup	~7–8 g
Nutritional yeast	2 tbsp	~8 g
Oats, dry	½ cup	~5 g
Brown rice, cooked	1 cup	~5 g
Whole grain bread	1 slice	~4 g
Broccoli, cooked	1 cup	~4 g

IF YOU USE POWDER

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN
Pea or soy protein powder	1 scoop (~30 g)	~24 g

Powder is a convenience, not a requirement. Plenty of people hit their number without it.

03 A day that hits about 100 g

Abstract targets are hard to act on. Here's what roughly 100 g actually looks like — ordinary food, nothing exotic.

BREAKFAST ABOUT 21 G	Oatmeal (½ cup dry oats, 5 g) made with soy milk (1 cup, 8 g), stirred through with peanut butter (2 tbsp, 8 g)
LUNCH ABOUT 29 G	Lentils (1 cup, 18 g) over quinoa (1 cup, 8 g) with vegetables (about 3 g)
SNACK ABOUT 18 G	Edamame (1 cup shelled, 18 g)
DINNER ABOUT 26 G	Tofu (100 g, 17 g) with brown rice (1 cup, 5 g) and broccoli (1 cup, 4 g)

Day's total: about 94 g. One slice of whole grain bread or a spoonful more peanut butter puts you over 100.

Notice what this day isn't: it isn't six protein shakes, and it isn't difficult. It's four ordinary meals with a legume or soy food in most of them.

04 The myth you can stop worrying about

You may have been told that plant proteins are “incomplete,” and that you have to carefully combine rice and beans at the same meal to get usable protein.

You don't.

Every plant food contains all nine essential amino acids. What varies is the proportions — grains tend to run lower in lysine, legumes tend to run lower in methionine. “Lower in” is not “missing.”

Your body also maintains a pool of free amino acids it draws on throughout the day, so the amino acids from your breakfast are still available to combine with the ones from your lunch. Deliberate meal-by-meal combining was a hypothesis from the 1970s that the research didn't support, and it was walked back decades ago. The idea just outlived the evidence.

What actually matters: eat a variety of plant foods across the day, and eat enough total protein. That's the whole rule.

05 If you're training hard

Three things change when training volume goes up:

1. Your total goes up, to roughly 1.2–1.4 g/kg for endurance work — more if you're also lifting.
2. Distribution starts to matter. Spreading protein across three or four meals of 25–40 g each is more useful than one enormous serving at dinner.

3. Recovery timing helps but isn't magic. Protein within a couple of hours after a hard session is sensible. The “anabolic window” was oversold — total daily intake matters far more than the stopwatch.

THE PRACTICAL VERSION

Put a legume or soy food in every meal, keep hemp seeds and nutritional yeast within reach for topping things, and your number takes care of itself.

THE SMALL PRINT. This is general nutrition information, not individual medical advice. If you have kidney disease, are pregnant, or are managing a medical condition, your protein needs may be genuinely different — talk to a doctor or a registered dietitian who knows your situation. Values are typical figures for common preparations and vary by brand, variety, and cooking method. Treat them as reliable planning numbers, not lab measurements.

Written by Matt at The Plantiful Life Blog, where I write about what the nutrition research actually says — and what's worth ignoring. blog.plantifullife.com

BE GOOD AND DO THE RIGHT THING.