

Pack a punch

Sophie Egan on 5 foods that contain both protein and fibre

EDAMAME BEANS

QUINOA



With protein hogging the spotlight lately, it may seem as if it's the main nutrient to focus on when it comes to good health. But fibre deserves attention too, nutrition experts say.

Most Americans, while eating plenty of protein, aren't actually meeting fibre recommendations — which are 25gm per day for women and 38gm per day for men.

Few foods offer both nutrients, said Cheryl Anderson, professor and dean of public health at the University of California, San Diego, US. Animal products that are high in protein, such as beef, fish and chicken, often contain no fibre. And foods that are high in fibre, such as fruits and vegetables, typically offer very little protein.

The sweet-spot foods that contain both nutrients offer a nice one-two punch of benefits, Anderson said.

Not only are they often satiating and inexpensive, she said, but you get both the protein perks, such as muscle maintenance, and the fibre perks, like improved gut health and

reduced risks of chronic conditions, all in one bite.

You only have so many calories to play with each day, said Penny Kris-Etherton, professor emerita of nutrition sciences at Penn State, US. So incorporating fibre and protein-rich foods can help you meet your nutrient needs without exceeding your calorie goals.

Here are five food groups that offer both.

Beans, Lentils and other Pulses

Pulses, which are dry, edible seeds of the legume family, include chickpeas, lentils, dry peas and dry beans, such as pinto, kidney and black beans. They top the list because of their relatively high protein and fibre levels. A half-cup serving of cooked lentils, for instance, has about 9gm of protein and 8gm of fibre. The same amount of cooked black beans offers about 7.5gm of each nutrient.

Research has found that people who regularly eat legumes tend to have healthy body weight, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol level and reduced risk of chronic health conditions such as

type 2 diabetes. One large review published in 2023 even found that for every additional 50gm of legumes people ate each day, their risk of dying from any cause during the study periods decreased by 6 per cent.

Tofu, Edamame and other Soy Foods

Soybeans (like edamame) and many products made from them (such as tofu, soy milk and tempeh) are nearly perfect foods when it comes to nutrition, said Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in the US.

They contain "generous amounts" of protein as well as healthy fats, he said — including heart-healthy omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

A half-cup of shelled edamame packs about 9gm of protein and 4gm of fibre. Raw tofu has about 22gm of protein and 3gm of fibre in every half-cup serving.

Unlike cow's milk, soy milk contains fibre. One cup of soy milk, for instance, provides 1.5gm of fibre along with 8gm of protein.

Nuts

Nuts are Willett's favourite fibre and protein-rich food. A 1-ounce or 28gm serving of peanuts, for instance, offers about 7.5gm of protein and 2.5gm of fibre. The same amount of almonds contains 6gm of protein and 3.5gm of fibre. Eating nuts has been linked with numerous health benefits, Willett said, including a healthy body weight and reduced risks of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Nuts contain beneficial fats like mono and polyunsaturated fats, which help improve cholesterol and make us feel full; vitamins and minerals, including B vitamins, magnesium and potassium, and the antioxidant Vitamin E.

Seeds

While seeds have health benefits similar to nuts — most notably in relation to heart health, Willett said — certain seeds, such as chia seeds and flaxseeds, tend to have more fibre and heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

Research suggests that regularly eating seeds can help support a healthy weight and

a healthy immune system and can help protect against inflammation, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

A 28gm serving of pumpkin seeds has about 8.5gm of protein and 2gm of fibre; the same amount of chia seeds has nearly 5gm of protein and 10gm of fibre.

Whole Grains

A grain is considered "whole" when it contains all three parts of the original kernel — the bran, the endosperm and the germ. Cereals such as arrowroot, brown rice, quinoa and oatmeal — as well as foods made from whole-grain flours, like whole-wheat bread and crackers — count as "whole grain".

Eating whole grains has been tied to a wide range of health benefits, including better gut health and reduced risks of colorectal cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Oatmeal made from a half-cup of rolled oats has about 6gm of protein and 5gm of fibre. A cup of cooked quinoa has about 8gm of protein and 5gm of fibre.

NEW YORK TIMES
NEWS SERVICE