

21 Surprising Sources of Protein for the Swimmer -1/10/2017

By Jill Castle, MS, RDN

Once, I counseled a swimmer who was a picky eater. She didn't like any meat or eggs, and was allergic to milk. It was challenging for her to eat enough protein throughout the day with these limitations. My job was to help her discover protein sources she liked and could tolerate.

You might be surprised to see the list of protein options I gave to her: a bowl of peas for a snack, cooked quinoa at lunch, and nuts and dried fruit for recovery.

Surprised? There are several delicious protein foods swimmers can use as part of a healthy diet plan. While the obvious sources come to mind, such as meat, eggs, and milk, there are many more available.

Why is Protein Important for the Swimmer?

Protein is an important nutrient for the growing swimmer, as it supplies the building blocks for overall growth, including muscle development, helps muscles recover from intense exercise, and even has a role in appetite regulation. Of course, other health benefits associated with protein exist, including a key role in immunity.

Protein is a nutrient we need each day; our bodies don't "make it" – we need to consume it. Most young athletes get plenty of protein in their diets, with some research suggesting consumption rates of up to two to three times the daily requirement.

Sources of Protein for the Swimmer

Animal products such as milk, yogurt, eggs, fish, meat and poultry are excellent sources of protein. They are efficiently absorbed and utilized by the body. However, there are more protein options, especially when you look to plant-based foods.

Plant sources of protein hold benefits for the athlete, too. One, plant foods generally come packaged with fiber, which can help with fullness and satiety, as well as regular bowel movements. Two, plant foods tend to be either low in fat, or, if they contain a source of fat, it's the healthy type, such as omega-3 fats. Three, plant foods are nutrient-rich. That is, they contain other nutrients, such as vitamin E, magnesium and B vitamins.

It's important to be aware of other protein options so swimmers can build protein variety in their diet.

Whether an omnivore or not, consider adding some of the following protein sources to meals and snacks. Not only will protein variety blossom, the swimmer will amplify nutrient consumption, as well.

Surprising Sources of Protein:

Food	Protein Content
Black Beans	42g/cup
Pumpkin Seeds	35g/cup
Peanuts	35g/cup
Sunflower Seeds	27g/cup
Buckwheat	22g/cup
Tofu	22g/half-cup
Lentils	18g/cup
Chickpea Pasta	14g/half-cup, cooked
Edamame	13g/cup
Peas, green	11g/cup
Amaranth	9g/cup
Soy Milk	8g/cup
Quinoa	8g/cup
Soybeans	8g/cup
Almonds	6g/ounce
Broccoli	6g/cup
Corn	5g/cup
Asparagus	5g/cup
Cashews	5g/ounce
Peanut Butter	7g/2 Tablespoons
Potato	8g/large (3" to 4.5" diameter)

*USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 28

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