A Short Course on Protein

*Tammy Roberts, MS., RD., LD  
Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

When most people think of protein, they know that it is important for maintenance of muscle but it has many more functions. Protein is present in every single cell in the body. Our bodies use protein to build and repair tissues, transport nutrients and make muscles contract. Protein is utilized in making enzymes, hormones and other body chemicals. Protein even helps to regulate water balance in the body.

How much protein do you need? Studies are currently being conducted on protein and new recommendations may be made. For right now, the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein is 56 grams for men over the age of 19 and 46 grams for women over 19. Protein should make up 10-35% of total calories. For a person consuming 2,000 calories a day, that would be 50-175 grams.

There are about 20 amino acids that the body uses to make a variety of proteins. The body produces some of those amino acids but we have to get the rest from food sources. There are nine amino acids that the body doesn’t produce. The amino acids that we have to get from a food source are referred to as essential.

When we think about protein, most of us probably think about meat. Food from animals such as meat, milk, poultry fish and eggs are widely accepted as good sources of protein. This is because they have all nine essential amino acids. Most plant sources of food have at least some protein except for fruit. Beans, nuts and seeds are considered good sources of protein.

Protein is a very important nutrient that has a wide variety of uses in the body. We all need to make sure we get enough. It is also important to know that if you take in more than you need it is stored as fat.

**Protein content of selected foods**

3 ½ ounces of roasted light meat chicken: 31 grams  
1 ounce of peanuts (35 peanuts): 8 grams  
1 egg: 6 grams  
8 ounces of milk: 8 grams  
Whole wheat roll: 4 grams  
½ cup of broccoli: 2 grams  
2 tablespoons peanut butter: 8 grams  
½ cup cooked pinto beans: 8 grams  
3 ½ ounces of pan-fried ground beef: 24 grams

The Creative Living Newsletter is a partnership among the Guadalupe Center, the Kansas Department on Aging, and University of Missouri Extension. If you have any suggestions for its content, please contact Nina Chen, Ph.D., Human Development Specialist, 816-252-5051.

*Spanish translation provided by Kelly Loeb, MSW through Support of the Kansas Department on Aging.