We Who Are Made Of Protein
Proteins--Of The Body,
By The Body, For The Body

Raymond O. West, M.D., M.P.H.

The eating habits of the legendary Jack Spratt and his wife were questionable at best, but with all we know about nutrition, do we do much better? We eat too much fat. We consume carbohydrates in vast amounts. And we chow down on protein; some would say too much, too often. Still, we can’t live without it, so let’s talk about that.

Carbohydrates ("carbs" these days) provide our minute by minute energy needs. Fat insulates us from extreme temperatures and softens body contours. So, we can get along for short spells without carbs and fats. But proteins are like the frame in a house. Without proteins, there could be no us, for they are our structure, our muscle and sinew, our viscera and brain, our skin, hair and nails.

Protein magic begins in the nether world of genes. Genes in fruits, grains and vegetables, fish, fowl and animals. Their genes make amino acids, and they beget proteins. When we eat those proteins they are mysteriously reduced again to amino acids which we then reassemble to create proteins that are now specific for us.

Fats and carbs are composed of oxygen, hydrogen and carbon. So are proteins but with the addition of nitrogen (and in some cases sulfur). It’s the nitrogen that makes proteins unique. Experts believe that we brew up as many as 100,000 different proteins, building them from scratch, each one contrived from a single gene.

Those onerous fats and those energizing carbs can be stored for future use. Not so with proteins. All those thousands of proteins are constantly at work doing unique tasks; like generating antibodies to chase down germs. Like fabricating enzymes to foster the tens of thousands of chemical reactions upon which life depends. Just as there are specific proteins for each body function so there are specific enzymes for each reaction. It’s well near mind-boggling! And for the evolutionist, it’s a giant monkey puzzles tree; a geologic column with barbs.

When protein intake is deficient we weaken and eventually die. We languish because we can’t make hormones like testosterone or adrenaline. When protein deficiency is prolonged, we consume our own proteins faster than they are rebuilt and replaced. Away goes muscle and all the rest. That’s not common in America, except perhaps in the elderly, persons with eating disorders, victims of AIDS and others.

What about too much protein? Problems there also. Too much flesh food causes calcium loss, and sometimes osteoprosis. Too much protein strains the kidneys, as if they needed more troubles.

Who gets enough protein? Everyone who eats a variety of plant foods like grains, nuts, seeds, fruits
and legumes. Who is in danger of too much? The "meat and potatoes" guys. Anyone heavy on flesh foods, meat, fish and fowl. And the health food devotees who feed on protein supplements. As little as 2 ounces of protein daily is plenty to replace daily loss. Getting enough protein is a piece of cake.

You can get this article in printer-friendly .pdf format! Click here!