Wouldn't it be great if you could drink a magic formula, swallow a pill or sprinkle fairy dust on your food and watch your muscles grow? That's often what young athletes hope will happen from eating protein.

Unfortunately, the reality is that eating protein doesn't equal big muscles. Instead, muscle growth is a complex process that relies on adequate consumption of protein and calories, hormones like human growth hormone and testosterone, and a healthy dose of exercise.

Here are a few facts and tips to keep in mind before you amp up your protein in search of a new physique.

Work Builds Muscle

Although eating protein doesn't build muscle on its own, the presence of protein in an athlete's diet is important. Believe it or not, when you exercise, such as lifting weights or running, some of your muscle cells break down. Protein from food helps repair this damage from exercising and builds up more muscle making them stronger.

Strike a Balance

While protein is important in building new muscles, eating the *right* amount of protein is key. Consuming more protein than your body needs may translate to excess calories that must be stored, usually in the form of fat. Too little protein consumption means your body has to supply it itself, which can result in muscle breakdown and loss. When you eat a balanced diet that includes enough calories and protein, your body won't use the protein as a calorie source — it will spare it to build muscles and repair them when needed.

How Much Protein Is Enough?

Young athletes need slightly more protein than kids who aren't athletes. Protein needs are based on age, gender and body weight, with kids and teens needing about 0.5 to 0.8 grams of protein for every pound of body weight. This is different from non-athletes, who need about 0.4 to 0.5 grams of protein per pound of body weight.

However, most athletes are able to meet their protein requirements and then some. In fact, studies show that young athletes eat two to three times the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein!

The Best Protein Sources

Many foods contain protein, but high-quality protein comes from beef, poultry, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products, soy and soy products, beans, nuts and nut butters, and more.

How much protein does your favorite food provide? Follow this chart to find out:

Food	Serving Size	Grams of Protein
Milk	1 cup	8
Yogurt	1 cup	8
Greek yogurt	1 cup	12 to 15
Egg	1	7
Cheese	1 ounce	7
Beans	½ cup	7 to 9
Nut butters	2 tablespoons	5 to 8
Ground beef, cooked	4 ounces	29
Chicken breast, cooked	4 ounces	27
Fish, salmon, cooked	4 ounces	29
Tofu	½ cup	20
Quinoa	½ cup	4

Beware of Protein Supplements

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This month's article was found on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Website: www.eatright.org

Some athletes wonder about using a protein supplement such as protein powder or a high-protein drink. Overall, this isn't necessary and even might be dangerous. Using protein supplements can lead to excessive protein intake, taxing the kidneys and promoting dehydration. Plus, the risk for contamination with steroids or hormones is real, as the regulation of dietary supplements is largely left to manufacturers.

The good news? You can meet your protein needs with food alone! Just be sure to eat a protein food, like the ones above, at each meal.

Monthly challenge:

Teenage Athlete- Remember that hard work builds muscle, eat to support your training.

Parents – Keep a balance, all foods are beneficial for your child athlete.

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