

## Protein

Finally, we get to the main concern of many people who are looking for an excuse not to fast—protein. According to the National Academy of Sciences, adult females need an average of 46 grams of protein per day, and adult males—52. These numbers may vary depending on your size, but not necessarily your current weight. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, but you really should weigh only 150, then your protein intake is calculated based on your ideal weight and not the extra weight you carry. The amount of protein intake also depends on your level of activity: if you exercise every day, you probably need a little more; if you spend your days sitting in an office, in your car, in your favorite arm chair, etc., then you probably need a little less. We will discuss some of these situations in due course, but for now, let us just average the number to 50 grams per day and see how we can get that much protein on a Lenten diet. On days when fish is allowed, you can actually get good animal protein without too much trouble. 2 oz. of cold-smoked salmon (lox) has approximately 13 grams of protein. A serving of canned fish—salmon or tuna—has the same. By the way, one can usually equals to 2 or 3 servings. So, if you eat a whole can of tuna, you get 36 grams of protein. And for those who choose to follow the Greek custom of eating shrimp, it also contains approximately the same amount of protein—12 grams of protein per 50 grams of shrimp. Remember that a serving— 2 oz. or approximately 60 grams—is a pretty small amount. In America, we are used to eating a lot more than one serving of anything. Two small servings of fish or shrimp contain half the daily amount of protein for an adult male. Among other common fasting foods, peanut butter has 7 grams of protein per 2 tablespoons, rice, buckwheat, and oatmeal—approximately 6 grams per one cup of cooked product, good bread (not the white fluffy chemical kind)—6 grams per slice, a cup of cooked beans or lentils—15 grams (that’s more protein than a serving of fish), 20 almonds (a handful)—5 grams. In other words, if you have a cup of oatmeal and a peanut-butter sandwich for breakfast, a cup of buckwheat and 100 grams of fish for lunch, and a cup of rice and bean mix for supper, you get 62 grams of protein—a bit more than an average adult male needs. I understand that many people do not like math and find these calculations confusing and incredibly boring, but just think about it: one does not really have to try hard to get enough protein on a Lenten diet. What about complete and incomplete protein? In order to understand this difference, we must understand how our body processes protein. When we eat a piece of meat, for example, our body does not take that meat and strap it directly to the biceps (even though that would be nice). Instead, it disassembles the protein contained in meat into small building blocks called amino acids and then reassembles those amino acids into protein for the human body. In addition, our body can create many of the amino acids from all sorts of building blocks found in many foods, but there are eight amino acids that our body is not able to create. Foods that contain these eight essential amino acids are said to have complete protein; foods that do not contain all eight are said to have incomplete protein. Meat, to be sure, does contain all eight, but so does fish, a mixture of beans and grains (such as rice), or quinoa. Quinoa is a grain that contains all eight essential amino acids—and that is 6 grams of complete protein per cup of cooked product. As you can see, it is very much possible to get more than enough protein on a simple fasting diet. Nutritionally, there is absolutely no reason why reasonably healthy people should not be able to abstain from meat, eggs, or milk for a period of time. People have practiced fasting for thousands of years—since well-before the incarnation of Christ. Psychologically, we may be craving a hotdog or ice-cream, but this craving has nothing to do with our bodies’ nutritional needs. Let us now take a look at some special circumstances in our lives, and how we can observe the fasts of the Church while studying, working, exercising, travelling, etc.