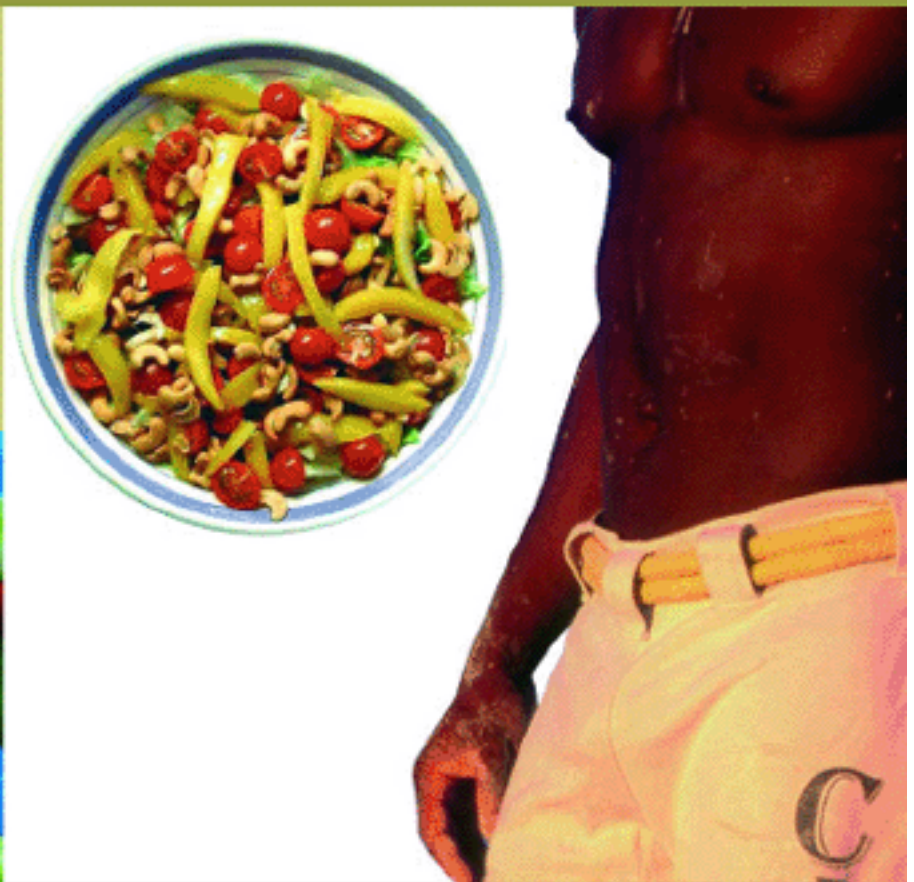


A question commonly asked by my fellow capoeiristas is "Am I getting enough protein?" and "What kind of protein should I eat?"



# The Healthy Capoeirista

| by molly lee |



**T**his is a tough question to respond to because the answer is relative and dependent on what Ann Louise Gittleman describes as our "bio-chemical individuality." In her book *Your Body Knows Best*, Gittleman states "in attempting to create a one-size-fits-all diet plan for all of us, we've lost the sense of our own uniqueness." Just like each capoeirista has a unique personality, reflected in the way he or she plays, each person has different foods that work better for him or her, according to his or her body type. In relation, the type and amount of protein that works for each individual varies according to his or her individual biological makeup. Simply stated, there is no one diet that is perfect for everyone. "The good news," as Gittleman explains is that, "there is an individually perfect diet that is suitable for each one of us." It is simply a matter of discovering what works best for you.

Since I have noticed that the topic of protein is one which becomes the focal point of discussion amongst capoeiristas when it comes to what to eat, let's first take a look at what the benefits of protein are. Protein plays a particularly important role in tissue repair, tissue growth, and in forming neurotransmitters in the brain. New muscle is built when we increase the protein intake in our diet. And since capoeira is a full body muscular workout, it is especially important to be aware that you are getting a sufficient amount of protein in your diet to build new muscle, and to support your body's process of healing and repair.

Another significant function of protein is that it boosts the body's metabolism, and enhances the immune system by producing antibodies and all the necessary amino acids required for the body. If you find yourself feeling sluggish

you exactly how much protein is right for you, only you can discover this yourself by experimenting and getting more in touch with what works best for you on a daily basis.

If you are still unsure about whether you're getting enough protein, some other warning signs of protein-deficiency besides feeling sluggish and low energy, include increased irritability, mental confusion, thinning skin, constant food cravings, increased sugar cravings, loss of hair, brittle nails, bloating, water retention, and water weight gain. If you're experiencing such symptoms, try gradually adding more protein to your diet and see how it makes you feel.

Now that we know the benefits of protein, the other question is "What kind of protein should I eat?" The answer, again, is a highly individualistic one, based on your bio-

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and low energy during training or in the roda, it means that your metabolism is low, caused by a lack of protein in your daily diet. Adding more protein-rich foods will help speed up your metabolism, resulting in higher energy and more endurance. The higher your metabolic rate, the faster you are able to burn off fat stores and better utilize the energy foods you eat.

Now that we've examined the main benefits of protein, let's examine the specific question of "Am I getting enough protein?" I am not going to list any numbers or milligrams in terms of how much protein you should eat, since as stated above, the answer is a highly individual one. The amount of protein appropriate in your diet depends entirely on you, including how often you are training and working out, your biological makeup, your blood type and other factors. Different experts on health, diet books, and magazines will all give you different answers to this question, and their answers often conflict each other anyways. Therefore, a simple rule to live by is to trust your body. Naturally, if you are training and working out more, you will find yourself feeling hungrier and craving more protein-rich foods. Trust and listen to what your body's telling you, and try increasing the amount of protein in your diet. Other days or periods of time when your level of training or activity is less, you will feel the need for smaller amounts. It is an ever-changing, day-to-day process, thus no diet book or even nutritionist can tell

chemical individuality, so I've tried to provide a range of answers to suit the diversity of capoeiristas out there.

Gittleman states in her book that the "two main sources of the most biologically complete dietary protein are meat and eggs, which have been misrepresented as harmful by the media the past several years. Avoiding any source of protein is not the way to reduce body fat, cholesterol levels, or the risk of heart disease."

If you are a meat eater, moderate amounts of high quality animal proteins, including chicken, beef, and fish are optimal sources, since they are complete proteins, meaning they contain the nine essential amino acids which are necessary for the body's repair. Note that the quality of the meat makes a huge difference in nutritional value, even if it does mean paying extra for it. So be sure to buy hormone-free, organic free range meats when you can. You can find high quality meats and fish can be found in most health food stores, local farmer's markets, and certain health food restaurants.

Besides meat, eggs are another excellent source of a complete protein, in addition to being high in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. This defies the common belief in mainstream health that eggs are unhealthy. Eggs have gotten a bad rep in the past few years through the cholesterol prop-

agenda presented through media, which promotes the myth that eggs cause high cholesterol. This is not the case, and should not be a reason not to avoid them. Eggs contain high levels of lecithin, which is actually a cholesterol-lowering agent. They are a healthy source of protein that is natural, convenient, and unprocessed. Also unique to eggs is the amino acid L-cysteine, which is essential to healthy nails and skin and hair. Biologically, as Gittleman states in her book, "The protein of eggs comes closest to matching the protein pattern best used by the body."

Eggs boost one's energy and also have a grounding, satisfying effect when you eat them. For those of you who tend to have more sugary breakfasts, like fruits and cereal - you may have noticed that you are still feeling hungry and spacey afterwards. As an experiment on yourself, try eating eggs for breakfast instead for a few days - you will likely feel more energized and focused afterwards. Like meat, the quality of the eggs you eat is really important. Organic, free-range eggs are worth the extra price in exchange for it's high nutrient-value.

This being said, this does not mean to go 'Atkins' crazy and only eat meat and eggs for breakfast lunch and dinner. Balance is the key. Overdoing it on any kind of food is unhealthy. So in addition to having protein-rich foods, make sure you're still including whole grains and vegetables in your daily diet, essential for healthy digestion, for boosting the immune system and fighting cancer.

Another recent societal health trend has been vegetarianism. A vegetarian is basically someone who does not eat meat and eats alternative sources of protein like beans, nuts and grains, seeds and dairy. A meatless diet has been promoted as a healthier way of eating, and works well for some, but not all individuals.

If you are vegetarian, and feel clearer and more energy without meat in your diet, great - keep it up! On the other hand, if you are vegetarian and find yourself low in energy, with brittle nails, poor skin, and/or are experiencing hair loss, you need to seriously examine if being vegetarian is working for you. Ask yourself first, what are my reasons for being vegetarian? Often, especially for women, it is to lose weight. If this is the case consider the fact that you do not lose weight simply by not eating

meat, and in fact will probably experience the opposite, since a deficiency in protein, often from meats, leads to major cravings and consequently, bingeing on carbohydrates and fats.

Others avoid meat for ethical and, or political reasons. Ok, but if it is causing your body to slowly deteriorate, is it really worth it? Perhaps reaching a compromise, say eating small amounts of meat from time to time will be sufficient. Vegetarian or meat-eater, the point is to keep an open mind when it comes to food, and to trust and respect what your body's telling you, whether it be to add or subtract meat from your diet.

Just like playing in the roda with different people teaches us certain things about ourselves, so does experimenting with different foods - keep an open, beginner's mind about it.

And to inspire you to begin your own experiment with using food as research, here is a list of foods which you may not know are good sources of protein to try adding to your diet: Edamame (Japanese green beans), sesame seeds, seaweed, chickpeas

Until next time, here's to good health in the roda. ■



#### CAPOEIRA FACT

CAPOEIRA CAN BURN UP TO 1500 CALORIES PER HOUR, SO A TWO HOUR CAPOEIRA WORKOUT IS AN INTENSE DRAIN ON THE HUMAN BODY. BE SURE TO FUEL YOURSELF WITH GOOD FOOD AND PLENTY OF WATER, AND BE SURE TO DRINK WATER OR A SPORTS DRINK DURING THE CLASS, ESPECIALLY IN WARMER CLIMATES OR IN THE SUMMER.

