



# Parliamentary and Scientific Committee



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## Sources, Health Benefits and Global Challenges of Protein

Protein is often associated with body builders and athletes, but protein is an essential nutrient for all of us to ensure we maintain good health. Dr Jorn Trommelen, Professor Alisa Welch and Professor Andy Salter spoke at our discussion meeting about the Sources, Health Benefits and Global Challenges of Protein.

Despite the average UK diet containing high levels of protein, the older generation are of particular concern when it comes to their nutritional intake. Older people's muscle mass and their ability to maintain it declines as they age, meaning protein is fundamental within their diets. Trommelen revealed that studies have shown that protein supplements have very little effect on older people. Therefore, prevention of muscular decline relies solely on a healthy diet and regular exercise. As people age intense exercise can become an intimidating thought, however any form of exercise should be encouraged, no matter small the activity may seem.

It has been estimated that around 3 million people in the UK suffer from malnutrition, however it is much less commonly discussed than other diseases, such as obesity. It's important that the UK is educated on malnutrition and how to

prevent it, including how to obtain enough high-quality protein in your diet. Welch suggested that a Government Campaign could be utilised to educate the importance of a healthy and varied diet. The focus of this campaign would not only be beneficial for the older generations but also for younger children too.

Malnutrition is also a major problem in third world countries across the globe. In order to aid in the improvement of diets and health of those in need, more possible protein sources need to be explored. Possible avenues to be studied further were highlighted by Salter, such as protein sources that can be grown in arid conditions and the use of insects to make flour with high levels of quality protein. Whilst completing these studies it is also incredibly important that the impact on the environment of protein sources is considered.

It is well known that production of animal-based products is incredibly unsustainable, however they are part of many people's everyday diet. Studies into reducing this negative environmental impact are being undertaken, for example the production of more sustainable feed for livestock. On an individual level, by decreasing the amount of meat and dairy products we consume,

we can all help to do our bit for the environment. By having multi-ingredient meals with a variety of plant-based products you can still achieve a health protein intake. Although plant-based products in general are more sustainable, there is still significant deforestation occurring around the world to provide space for crops, such as in South America for soybean production.

The discussion from this meeting has made it clear that protein is a topic a lot more complex than you may think. It's vital that the studies being undertaken by Trommelen, Welch, Salter and many more is continued to obtain a further understanding alongside new discoveries. One of the Government's key steps moving forward is to ensure the education of the general public on healthy eating and the importance of protein. The closing remarks of the meeting reminded us of the ease of including protein in your diet... with a wonderful plate of beans on toast!

*Charlotte Hall*

*P&SC Discussion Meeting, 'Sources, Health Benefits and Global Challenges of Protein', 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020*

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