Consuming a gram to two grams of protein per pound of bodyweight isn’t a task everyone is used to or currently doing. If your goal is to build muscle, it must be understood how muscle grows in the first place. You can’t expect to pack on muscle without understanding how the process works. For starters, you have a basic minimum caloric need just to maintain your weight, muscle and health. This is determined based on your age, size, weight and gender, and primarily based around how many calories you’re expending (burning) each day. You burn calories in everything you do -- from sleeping to walking to exercising. And the more intense the activity, the more calories you burn.

Due to the nature of physical activity, athletes burn far more calories than non-athletes. Therefore they require more calories through the consumption of food than their non-athlete counterparts.

We know we need to eat well and eat often. But what we eat -- and what we choose not to eat -- are also important factors. It’s pretty common for an athlete to require 0.8 - 1.2 grams of protein per pound of bodyweight to maintain muscle.

Building muscle, which is our specific topic, often requires the consumption of 1.2 - 2.0 grams of protein per pound of bodyweight. It may seem like a lot. But thousands of bodybuilders and athletes -- who dedicate their personal or professional lives to building muscle -- have found that this system is effective. It’s just the way the body works. It is a system which supports any sports interest from tennis to running to lifting weights. We break the body down through exercise and need to build it back up through sound and adequate nutrition.

You’re probably not used to consuming this volume of food. But it’s also one of the main reasons why “vegans” as a group get the reputation for being underweight. It’s not a baseless stereotype. Of course, it’s not just consuming a lot of food that is important in building muscle. It’s also an exercise program that supports the food intake.

Muscle grows as a result of the micro-tears that happen within a muscle following resistance training, usually weight training. Lifting weights or putting your body under physical stress in other ways (such as manual labor or bodyweight exercises) causes the muscle fibers to tear.

The food you eat, supplements you take, and ensuing rest you get all help in the recovery process that builds you back up bigger and stronger. Without exercise, you’re likely to gain fat eating a higher than usual calorie diet. That’s because the caloric consumption will greatly outweigh the caloric expenditure.

When put together appropriately, they work harmoniously and create outstanding results of proper nourishment, fat-burning and muscle building. You can “have your cake” and burn it off too.

Consuming a gram to two grams of protein per pound of bodyweight isn’t a task everyone is used to or currently doing. If
it were, we’d all be walking around as muscle-bound citizens mimicking cartoon super heroes. Of course that image isn’t the goal of many, but recovering properly from any type of exercise is our primary goal.

This usually requires the consumption of six to eight meals a day with the right amount of protein, carbohydrates and fats throughout the day. If the exercise is focused more on cardiovascular training such as running, a higher proportion of carbohydrates would be consumed, lowering the amount of total protein. But when the exercise is truly based on strong resistance training such as weight lifting, protein consumption becomes a primary focus to repair muscles that are damaged much differently than they are during running, cycling or swimming.

Regardless of your sports interest, consuming smaller meals throughout the day keeps you constantly nourished and fueled for a run, a tennis match, cycling, martial arts or anything else, providing important nutrition to start the day, throughout the day and pre and post-exercise. Eating six to eight times a day may seem like a daunting task. But when you exercise once or twice a day, you’ll realize that you’ll want pre and post-workout meals in addition to your standard meals. Before you know it, you will have eaten nearly eight times in a day without overeating, while assisting your body’s ability to recover from exercise and build muscle.

The macro-nutrient percentage breakdown for an active person may look like this:

70% of calories from carbohydrates
20% coming from protein
10% coming from fats

The macro-nutrient percentage breakdown for a bodybuilder or someone focused specifically on building muscle may look like this:

50% of calories from carbohydrates
30% coming from protein
20% coming from fats

The exact percentages may change daily based on diet. They also vary per individual based on factors such as your food preferences, your rate of metabolism (your body’s ability to burn fat), and your specific athletic goals.

Though it may not be common to consume a lot of food, eating every two to three hours, for athletes training up to hours a day, it becomes a higher focus and a bigger part of everyday life. It’s not extremely challenging either, it just takes some dedication, focus, planning and preparation. I personally enjoy eating frequently throughout the day. My meals tend to be a bit smaller and I get to incorporate a lot of variety, flavors and themes because I am eating more frequently than just three or four meals a day.

In general fruits are the easiest to digest and are often best eaten alone rather than combined with other foods such as protein-rich foods. Consumed at the same time could slow down digestion in many people, so some people choose to eat fruit by itself and consume other carbohydrates with proteins in other meals throughout the day.

Whether you are a professional athlete or weekend warrior or consider lifting weights a hobby, building muscle on a plant-based diet should be easy, fun and highly accessible regardless of where you are. Eat healthy foods, in large quantities if you’re training regularly, and allow adaptation and muscle growth to happen.

Have fun, stay motivated, visualize success down the road, and work hard consistently to achieve meaningful goals.