

SHAPE

Ask the Diet Doctor: Are Protein Shakes Truly Healthy?

By Mike Roussell, PhD

Q: "Are protein shakes safe and healthy? They seem so processed..."

A: [Protein shakes](#) are an easy way to [boost your daily protein intake](#) and to incorporate protein into each of your meals and snacks. But not all brands are created equal. By taking a closer look at the ingredients in different brands of protein powder, you'll see that there's a broad range of processing.

For example, here's the ingredient list for the extremely popular [Optimum Nutrition](#) 100% Whey Protein Blend: *Whey Protein Isolates, Whey Protein Concentrate, Whey Peptides, Cocoa (Processed With Alkali), Artificial Flavors, Lecithin, Acesulfame Potassium, Aminogen®, Lactase.*

It contains three different types of whey protein, cocoa (for chocolate flavor), artificial flavors, lecithin to help the powder mix with liquids easier, Acesulfame Potassium (an artificial sweetener), and two digestive aids (aminogen and lactase). Not too bad, in my opinion. Another good choice is BiPro, a minimally processed protein powder containing only [whey protein isolate](#) and a little lecithin (to aid in mixing with liquid).

A number of other popular [protein powders](#) include more than 30 different ingredients, many of which are food science tools used to prevent caking of the powder, improve how it feels in your mouth, and enhance shelf life.

Whether you choose a protein powder that contains essentially no processing or additives like BiPro or one that is minimally processed and artificially sweetened like Optimum Nutrition 100% Whey, it is important to remember that protein powders are not magical. They are simply a convenient way to fit protein into your diet.

According to research from the National Institute of Medicine, you can safely eat 30 percent of your calories from protein with zero concern about kidney or liver problems (commonly touted dangers of a high-protein diet). Aside from not eliciting any kidney or liver problems, [eating more protein](#) is actually *better* for you. A 2009 study from the University Illinois found that when overweight and obese participants ate twice the recommended daily amount for protein, they experienced greater changes in body-fat percentage and fat loss compared to women who ate lower, traditionally-recommended levels of protein.

Read nutrition labels of protein powder before you buy it to ensure that you aren't getting a frankenfood. Then, use protein powder to help boost your overall protein intake, and you'll be healthier for it.

Meet the Diet Doctor: Mike Roussell, PhD

Author, speaker, and nutritional consultant Mike Roussell, PhD is known for transforming complex

nutritional concepts into practical eating habits that his clients can use to ensure permanent weight loss and long lasting health. Dr. Roussell holds a bachelor degree in [biochemistry](#) from Hobart College and a doctorate in nutrition from Pennsylvania State University. Mike is the founder of Naked Nutrition, LLC, a multimedia nutrition company that provides health and nutrition solutions directly to consumers and industry professionals via DVDs, books, ebooks, audio programs, monthly newsletters, live events, and white papers. To learn more, check out Dr. Roussell's popular diet and nutrition blog, MikeRoussell.com.