

## Protein Pros

By Vera Tweed, Photography by Pornchai Mittongtare

Find out how protein keeps you lean and healthy. Plus, check out portable and delicious options

If you're looking for a quick, inexpensive meal near your office or at the mall, it's difficult to find fish or chicken that isn't buried in batter, deep fried beyond recognition, drowned in goey sauce (with lots of sugar—yum) and quite likely stuffed into an oversized white bun. Looking at such a giant sandwich, it's hard to imagine that the little portion of protein within holds the key to a lean, healthy body—if only it could escape!

In fact, protein is one of three "macronutrients," food components we require in large quantities (carbohydrates and fats are the others), in contrast to "micronutrients," vitamins and minerals we need in small quantities. Only protein provides amino acids, the building blocks that make up muscles and are essential for tissue repair.

We lose muscle with age, and protein is a vital nutrient to slow down this process, which typically includes loss of strength, increase in body fat, and frailty that leads to falls and the inability to perform routine tasks such as getting out of bed and taking a shower.

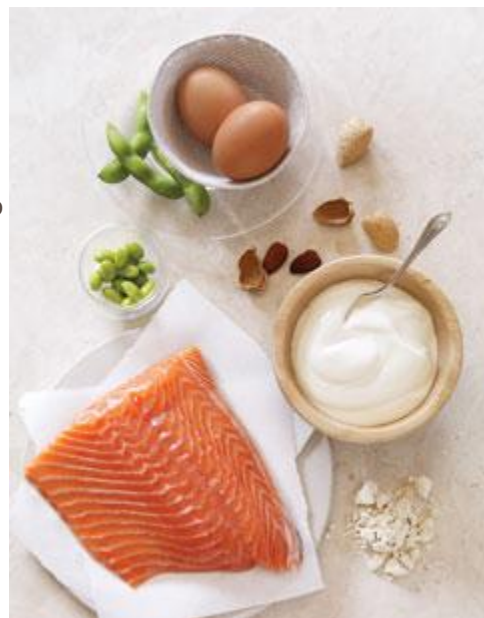
Protein is also necessary for the production of enzymes and hormones; essential for healthy immune function; and important for the normal development of babies in the womb and children. Among America's thin minority, women and the elderly are most prone to not getting enough, which speeds up muscle loss and aging.

## The Appetite Solution

Weight gain underlies most of today's health problems, from diabetes to osteoarthritis, and protein is a key part of the solution. However, it's beneficial only when it isn't adulterated with the hazardous trimmings found in breaded, fried "fast foods."

"Everyone is fixated on calories, but I believe that eating less and exercising more is wrong. It doesn't work," says Jorge Cruise, author of *The Belly Fat Cure*. "The real secret is avoiding hidden sugar, and protein is very beneficial to weight loss, anti-aging, and overall health because it has very little or no hidden sugar at all."

Unlike carbohydrates and sugar, says Cruise, "Protein is powerful because it causes your body to become satiated very quickly, and it's not something we're prone to overeating. Carbs and sugar do the opposite—they cause you to feel more



hungry." Cruise's weight-loss strategy recommends eliminating hidden sugars, not limiting lean proteins and non-starchy vegetables, including healthy fats, and enjoying some sweet treats and/or wine.

## Weight-Loss Research

Studies have found that compared to carbohydrate-rich diets, those with a higher percentage of protein lead to more weight loss, with more fat loss and less loss of muscle. For example, researchers at the University of Florida analyzed 87 studies that compared results of different types of weight-loss regimens. Their conclusions, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, show that people following high-protein/low-carb plans for more than 12 weeks lost over 14 pounds more than those eating the same number of calories on a high-carb diet plan. And, the high-protein approach preserved more muscle.

According to research presented at a meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine, compared to carbohydrates and fats, proteins require more effort to be broken down, burning extra calories during digestion. As a result, simply substituting protein for other macronutrients can, by itself, cause some weight loss.

## How Much Do You Need?

If a healthy, lean body is your goal, exercise is definitely part of the equation, and the amount of protein you require depends on the intensity and type of physical activity. "Protein needs increase in proportion to muscle breakdown during exercise," says Mike Bracko, EdD, director of the Occupational Performance Institute in Calgary, Canada. Situations that cause muscle breakdown and require extra protein, he says, include:

- Doing strength training with heavy weights or intense, Navy SEAL-style routines using your own body weight for resistance.
- Running hard for 30 or more minutes per day, when gearing up for a marathon or triathlon, or doing any other intense aerobic training, either at a constant level or in intervals. A brisk walk or light jog doesn't increase protein needs.

The 30 minutes following intense workouts is the best time to eat protein, combined with carbohydrates for better absorption, says Bracko, as that's when the muscles are most receptive to amino acids that repair exercise-induced damage. However, he cautions that too much protein, with or without exercise, will be stored as fat, just like an excess of any other food.

In combination with exercise, branched chain amino acids (BCAAs)—leucine, valine and isoleucine—can be especially helpful. "Some studies have shown that they can help reduce body fat, improve muscle strength and speed of contraction, and improve performance and recovery," says Bracko. Lean red meat, skim milk, and whey protein are the richest sources of BCAAs, and some protein powders are formulated to deliver extra BCAAs.

## Products

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### TYPES OF PROTEIN POWDERS

Animal Sources  
Whey (from cow's milk, may be lactose-free)  
Casein (from cow's milk)  
Goat's milk  
Egg (from egg whites)

Vegetable Sources  
Soy  
Hemp  
Rice  
Pea



**GARDEN OF LIFE RAW PROTEIN** is a raw, vegan organic protein powder with 18 grams (35%) of the daily value per serving, plus all essential amino acids. It mixes instantly and has a neutral taste.

**BALANCED PLANETS SUPERFOODS DAILY POWER SHAKE WITH PGX WHEY PROTEIN** (in vanilla and chocolate) has whey protein, vitamins, and PGX, a fiber shown to help regulate blood sugar and reduce cravings.

**NATURE'S PLUS SPIRU-TEIN GOLD BANANA BERRY BLAST** features soy-free vegetarian protein from chia, rice, pea, and flax. Also contains: minerals, energy nutrients, organic whole foods, enzymes, and more.

**SOLGAR WHEY TO GO** is a gluten-free and mostly lactose-free protein powder with a blend of uniquely processed whey protein isolate and whey concentrates. Available in strawberry, chocolate, and vanilla flavors.

**SOURCE NATURALS WHEY TO HEALTH** is 100 percent certified organic whey protein powder concentrate—the first of its kind. It's perfect for those following a low-carb diet (just 1 g of sugar per rounded scoop).