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5 Reasons You May Need More Protein— Even on a Paleo Diet



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Most people naturally eat the right amount of protein for their needs. Protein is such a crucial nutrient that the brain has specific mechanisms that increase your desire for it if you need more and decrease your desire for it if you're getting too much; these mechanisms are difficult to override through willpower alone. For this reason, my general recommendation is to simply eat as much protein as you crave.

In the U.S., this typically averages about 15 percent of the total calories consumed each day (roughly 113 grams for an active male eating 3,000 calories, or 83 grams for an active female consuming 2,200 calories).

However, there are certain situations where it may be advantageous to increase protein intake to **20 to 30 percent** of calories, or even as high as **35 percent** of total calories—at least temporarily.

Find out if eating more protein makes sense for you, even if you eat a Paleo diet.

"Wait a second," you might say. "Don't high-protein diets cause kidney disease and cancer?" This is yet another urban myth. Studies have shown that protein intakes up to 35 percent of calories (or even higher) are safe for people without pre-existing kidney problems—especially if you make sure to get enough glycine in your diet. And there's no evidence that high protein diets increase the risk of cancer, as long as you're eating a balanced, nutrient-dense diet. For more information, read [this recent article](#) I wrote on the topic.

Now let's take a closer look at five groups of people that often benefit from a higher protein intake.

Five Groups of People That May Benefit from a Higher Protein Intake



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satisfied when we eat it. [\(2\)](#) When we feel more satisfied, we naturally eat less—and lose weight without trying.

For example, researchers put a group of overweight volunteers into an environment where food intake could be controlled precisely. After increasing their protein intake from 15 percent of calories to 30 percent, study participants consumed about **440 fewer calories** per day, and lost an average of 11 pounds over 12 weeks. They did this without counting calories or intentionally eating less. [\(3\)](#) Hat tip to Dr. Stephan Guyenet for this study.)

In fact, some recent research suggests that the reason low-carb diets are effective for weight loss is not because they are low in carbohydrate, but because they are high in protein. [\(4\)](#)

2. People with Blood Sugar and Metabolic Problems

High-protein diets have also been shown to have a stabilizing effect on blood sugar, and lead to beneficial changes in a wide range of metabolic, cardiovascular and inflammatory markers, from insulin sensitivity to cholesterol and triglycerides to C-reactive protein. [\(5\)](#), [\(6\)](#)

3. Athletes and People Who Train Hard

Protein is the nutrient required to build and rebuild muscle. If you want to add or maintain muscle mass (i.e. if you're an endurance athlete, weightlifter, CrossFitter, or you train hard in other activities or sports), you should consume more protein.

Extra protein can be especially beneficial after a hard workout or training session, as most of you who are training hard already know.

4. The Elderly and the Chronically Ill

Both the elderly and the chronically ill frequently suffer from muscle wasting. A higher protein diet can help to prevent further tissue breakdown and reduce the adverse effects of both aging and chronic illness.



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intake—especially in the morning—can boost energy levels, reduce jitteriness, agitation and mood swings, improve sleep, and sharpen brain function. I've seen this repeatedly in my work with patients.

If you're chronically stressed, the tissues in your body literally start to break down. Stress researchers call this "wear and tear" on the body *allostatic load*. (7) The tissue breakdown is caused in part by collagen proteins being used up faster than they are replaced.

So, if you're under a lot of stress, it's especially important to eat proteins that contain collagen.

How Much Protein Do You Need?

If you're in one of the groups above, I recommend consuming between **20 and 35 percent** of calories from protein each day. The higher end of that scale (30–35 percent) would be for aggressive weight loss, metabolic problems, and people doing extreme training; the middle end (25–30 percent) for athletes and people training at moderate to vigorous intensity, and the lower end (20–25 percent) for the elderly, chronically ill, and people under a lot of stress. That said, these are just general guidelines and I suggest you experiment through the entire range to see what works best for you.

This is quite possibly much more protein than you're eating now, even if you're following a Paleo-type diet based on [ancestral health](#). Let's look at some examples using the ranges below:

% of calories as protein	2,200 calorie diet (g)	3,000 calorie diet (g)
35%	193	263
30%	165	225
25%	138	188
20%	110	150

Now, let's look at a typical day's worth of protein on a Paleo diet.



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- grams.
- Snack: one ounce of almonds (about 23 almonds). Approximately 6 grams.
 - Dinner: 1/4–1/2 pound of beef sirloin, sweet potato, steamed broccoli. Approximately 35–70 grams.

This adds up to between 86 and 151 grams of protein, or 16–27 percent of calories on a 2,200 calorie diet and 11–20 percent of calories on a 3,000 calorie diet.

As you can see, this falls short of the protein targets for most categories in the table above, especially if you're eating closer to 3,000 calories and/or trying to get more than 25 percent of calories from protein.

When Protein Powder Makes Sense

Obviously one option is to simply increase your intake of [whole-food proteins](#), such as meat, fish, eggs, and nuts (though it's worth pointing out that the protein in nuts is not as readily absorbed as animal proteins). For example, you could start your day with 1/2 fillet of salmon (about 40 grams of protein) instead of two eggs, and/or you could eat closer to a pound of protein for lunch and dinner. If you feel good [eating this much animal protein](#), this is what I'd recommend; it's always best to meet nutrient needs from whole food.

But let's face it: not everyone wants to eat over two pounds of fish, meat and poultry each day. I love animal protein myself, and I feel better with a higher protein intake, but even I get tired of eating so much of it so frequently. I have a lot of patients—both male and female—that feel the same way.

And it's not just a matter of preference. I have a lot of patients with low stomach acid, bile insufficiency, or other digestive problems that have trouble digesting large amounts of meat and fish. I also have patients that are intolerant of eggs (or other animal proteins). Ultimately, the goal is to heal their gut so they can eat as much of these foods as they'd like.

These are the situations where protein powder can be a useful addition.

You can add a protein shake in between your meals (or in place of breakfast, perhaps) to boost your overall protein intake.





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My (New) Favorite Protein Powder—and the One I Recommend to My Patients

There are three important factors in choosing a protein powder: tolerability, quality, and bioavailability.

Tolerability refers to how likely the protein is to cause an adverse reaction. Whey protein is a great choice for many people, but I've noticed that quite a few of my patients don't tolerate it well. I don't either, despite the fact that I don't have an issue with dairy products in general. I tend to feel somewhat bloated after consuming whey protein.

Quality refers to the quality of the protein source, how it is processed, and how it is manufactured. There's obviously a ton of junk out there, especially in the bodybuilding community. If you're going to use a protein powder, you should choose the highest quality product you can get.

Bioavailability refers to how completely absorbed the protein is. In general, plant proteins like pea and rice are much less bioavailable than animal proteins like whey, egg and beef.

With all of this in mind, I was excited to learn about a new product that has recently become available called [PurePaleo](#). It's a protein powder with several unique characteristics:



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- It's made from hydrolyzed beef protein. Hydrolyzed means that it is "pre-digested" and broken down into smaller peptides that are easier to absorb, and thus more bioavailable than most other proteins.
- It's sourced from hormone-free, antibiotic-free, non-GMO cows in Sweden that are raised on pasture, and it's tested to be free of hormones, antibiotics, and allergens.
- It features the power of beef to build muscle, cartilage, and ligaments, which is ideal for athletes, people training hard, those suffering from chronic illness, and the elderly.
- It contains both complete and collagen proteins that are naturally found in beef. As I said earlier in the article, collagen is essential for tissue regeneration and repair and protective for anyone under stress.
- It is sweetened with stevia and is very low in carbohydrate.

[PurePaleo](#) comes in both vanilla and chocolate flavors. I like both, but usually prefer the chocolate. I like it mixed with almond or coconut milk on its own, but sometimes I'll add some spinach or other greens, vegetable juice, or berries. Since it's already somewhat sweet, I don't like it mixed with banana or other sweet fruits as much.

And in case you're wondering, it doesn't taste like beef at all. In fact, I did some "blinded" taste tests with friends and family members, and they had no idea it was a beef protein powder.

The best part for me, and many of my patients, is how good I feel after I take some. I don't have the bloating I get after consuming whey, I feel more energized, and I'm seeing better gains in the gym and recovery after workouts.

If you'd like to give it a try, you can [order it from my store](#) in either chocolate or vanilla.

7 REFERENCES




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