

Do You Need to Punch Up the Protein?**Why is protein important?**

Protein is a major component of many parts of your body, from muscle and bone, to the immune system, hormones, blood, and much more. Current research suggests that while many Americans may be getting more protein than they need, older adults may benefit from a little extra of this power-packed nutrient. With age, protein is lost from muscle and skin, as well as from blood and the immune system.

Bone Strength: Research at the Center on Aging at Tufts University found that healthy men and women, ages 65 and older) who ate about 80 grams of protein a day and took a bone supplement containing calcium and vitamin D increased their bone density measurements over three years instead of losing bone.

Heart Health: A study at Johns Hopkins University found that volunteers with mild high blood pressure improved both blood pressure measurements and blood cholesterol levels after only 6 weeks on a diet with 25 % of their calories from protein. For someone eating 1600 calories daily, that would be about 100 grams of protein. Ten percent of that was from foods like cottage cheese, almonds, black beans, chicken, egg substitutes and vegetarian burgers.

Weight Loss Benefits: Researchers at the University of Washington School of Medicine found that study participants on a diet with 30% of their calories from protein felt more full and significantly less hungry than when on a diet with 15% of the calories from protein. In both cases 50% of their calories were carbohydrates in the form of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and fat levels were kept low. When allowed to eat as much or as little as they wanted of the higher protein diet, participants ate 400 fewer calories a day and lost an average of 11 pounds over 12 weeks.

Muscle Strength: Inadequate protein intake leads to loss of muscle mass and function. This can lead to weakness and falls. Adding a little extra protein to the diet may help prevent this loss. Exercise is also very important in maintaining muscle strength and mass.

How much is enough? The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein for men is 63 grams and 50 for women. However, as the above studies show, older adults may benefit from eating closer to 80 to 100 grams of protein a day.

Top Rated Protein Sources

Food	Protein (grams)	Food	Protein (grams)
Fish, poultry, lean meat (3oz)	20-30	Milk, 1% or Fat free (8 oz)	8
Cottage cheese, LF (1/2 cup)	14	Peanut butter (2 Tblsp)	8
Tofu, firm (3 oz)	13	Pudding (1 cup)	8
Yogurt, LF (6-8oz)	11	Cheese (1 oz)	7
Kashi GoLean cereal (3/4cup)	10	Nuts (1 oz or 28 peanuts)	7
Lentils, cooked (1/2 cup)	9	Egg (1)	6