



THE  
COMPLETE GUIDE  
TO

# PROTEIN

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# INTRODUCTION

As you know, nutrition is a big part of the muscle-building and fat loss puzzle. From monitoring calorie intake to addressing any nutrient deficiencies, everything we do with our nutrition can change the way we see results.

After years of coaching clients both in person and online, I've discovered the previous statement to be more true than I could've ever imagined. So many individuals have come to me seeking an answer to their health and fitness roadblocks. They've been training hard, and eating clean, but things just don't seem to be working.

Over the years, I have created a red-flag checklist to help me determine what the individual needs and how bad they need it. No matter what the circumstances are, there is always something that comes up that must be addressed in order for them to see the progress they desire. The checklist includes several major things like sleep, nutrition, training, and stress. However, it's important that I look at things in more detail for me to help them best.

I have come to realize that there are many red flags that people have in common when they first come to work with me. The most common area of concern that I see is a lack of adequate protein. You see, although the fitness and bodybuilding industry has coined protein as the magical macronutrient for building muscle, it's also a magical macronutrient for fat loss and overall health, too.



# PROTEIN

## THE “MAGICAL” MACRONUTRIENT

Let me be clear. Protein really isn't magical. It doesn't have magically altering properties, nor does it provide instant solutions for people on its own. I simply used the word “magical” to make it seem a lot cooler than “macronutrient” sounds by itself.

In order to understand protein, what it is, and why it's so important, we must first understand macronutrients.

Macronutrients are nutrients in our food that our bodies need in large quantities. They also contain calories. The most common major macronutrients are protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Although all of these nutrients contain calories, they are not one and the same. Both protein and carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram, while fat contains 9 calories per gram. Not only do these macronutrients contain different amounts of calories, they play a different role in the body as well.

Protein is made up of amino acids and can help our body with several things like hormone production, building/maintaining tissue, making enzymes, using energy, and more. In this guide, we'll focus on protein's role of building and maintaining tissue, specifically, lean muscle tissue.

## PROTEIN'S ROLE IN YOUR GAINS

We can thank the juiceheads and wannabe bodybuilders for ruining the word “gains” before it could even be given time to become great. You see, gains are gains. You may think that gains are the gains that douchebros make in the gym when they do half-rep bench press with weight that is far too heavy. No, gains are any gains (progress) that you make in your health and fitness journey. Lost ten pounds of fat? Fat loss gains. Set a personal best on your squat? Gains. Ate 5 more servings of vegetables this week than last? Gains. You get the point. Let's take a look at how protein affects the gains you're trying to make in your health and fitness journey.

As I mentioned, the most important thing to know is that protein is a major key to building and maintaining lean muscle tissue. Remember the amino acids I mentioned earlier that come from protein? Good. So those amino acids play a role in repairing and building muscle after a signal (your training/workout) has been sent to the body asking it to adapt. When that signal has been sent, and muscles have been worked, amino acids come into the picture to



help facilitate the process of repairing and building tissue. If you do not have enough amino acids coming from whole, natural sources of protein, you could potentially be at risk for slow recovery, injury, and muscle loss. At this point you may be thinking that you're just going to down as many branched-chain amino acids as possible, but I'm going to stop you there. It is extremely important that you get all of your protein intake from natural sources. They are more nutrient dense and will be better for your body now, and especially in the long-term. If you're eating enough protein in the day, you will not have to worry about a lack of amino acids. We'll address how much protein you should be eating later on.

So far it seems that protein is very important for those that are wanting to build and maintain high amounts of muscle tissue. It certainly is. However, building and maintaining muscle is extremely important for all individuals, no matter the goal. This means that getting adequate protein is just as important for bodybuilders as it is for those that want to simply be healthy, and especially for those of you that are wanting to lose fat, tone, and define certain parts of your body. Let me tell you why.

## PROTEIN, LEAN MUSCLE, AND YOUR METABOLIC RATE

The human metabolism is a beautifully complex mechanism. It is known to be just as baffling as the wonderfully complex universe we live in. There are so many moving parts, and so many potential factors that can play a role in how it operates. We still have so much to figure out. Although there is much to learn, we do know that lean muscle tissue (skeletal muscle tissue) can heavily influence the human metabolism. We know that muscle is an expensive tissue, as it costs lots of energy (calories) to maintain. The more lean muscle that an individual has, the more calories they automatically burn in a day. The word "automatically" is important to note.

There are two ways you burn calories. You burn them automatically and you burn them manually. Automatic calorie burn happens as you are just doing our thing. We can also refer to this as your Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR). Your BMR is a fancy and technical term for the amount of calories your burn at rest. The higher your BMR is (the more calories you burn at rest) the easier it will be to lose body fat, and stay lean year-round. Obviously we are able to burn calories manually through exercise. But, why is automatic calorie burn better?

Burning a high amount of calories automatically is better for two reasons. The first being that living and enjoying the pleasures of modern life are more doable. When you burn a lot of

calories at rest, you can go out with your friends and enjoy two pieces of pizza without worrying about fat gain. You can have an extra scoop of ice cream without worrying about it going to your waist. Another reason automatic calorie burn is better is simply this: ain't nobody got time to be running on the treadmill 24/7. Seriously. The higher your BMR is, the less physical work you'll have to do to maintain your lean body year round. Does that mean you can be a couch potato and stay lean? Of course not. I'm simply saying you would be able to stay lean lifting 3-4 days a week rather than running for 5-6 days/week.

You get the idea at this point. You need a high BMR to be able to get lean and stay lean without strict diets. Let's bring it back full circle.

In order to get that BMR roaring, you need to increase your lean muscle mass. Now, hear me out. I'm not speaking of a twenty pound increase in lean muscle to see a few extra calories burned during the day. No no. Even the slightest increase in lean muscle tissue can help you burn more calories automatically. Some of the clients I've worked with spent the first few months of our time together putting 3-5 pounds of lean muscle on in order to burn 300-500 extra calories each day! Note that this example is not an exact equation. All individuals are different. This is simply a trend I've seen with the many clients I've worked with. If you'd like more info on how to specifically increase your metabolic rate and automatic calorie burn, check out the Eat More, Get Leaner ebook. It's free. You're welcome.

The increase in lean muscle tissue comes from a good balance of resistance training as well as proper nutrition. You can eat adequate protein without lifting, and you won't see the results you're looking for. You can lift several days per week and under-consume protein, and you won't see the results you're looking for. Seeing an increase in lean muscle tissue and your metabolic rate comes from both resistance training and adequate protein together, as well as well-rounded nutrition practices in general.

So, if even a slight increase in lean muscle tissue can mean more calories burned automatically, you need to make sure your protein intake is just right.

## HOW MUCH PROTEIN DO YOU NEED?

Before I get to numbers, I want to make sure you're in the know. Adequate protein alone is not enough to see changes in your automatic calorie burn. Changes in lean muscle tissue come from a sound resistance training routine, too. Make sure you are eating enough protein AND following a well-rounded resistance training program.

Ok, let's talk numbers. For years and years it's been told that we need to be eating anywhere from

1-2g of protein per pound of body weight. I know exactly what you're thinking. "Damn, how the eff am I supposed to eat twice my bodyweight in grams of protein each day?" Not to worry, you don't need to. Getting that much protein from whole foods is nearly impossible. We can thank the supplement industry for making those claims. After all, if we can't get all that protein from whole foods, where else will it come from? Oh yeah, crap-filled "protein" powders.

Anyway, we now know that if you're wanting to maintain and build lean muscle, you should aim for .6-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight for most individuals. Severely overweight and obese individuals should lean toward the lower end of that range, while others can lean toward the higher end of that range. If you are not obese or heavily overweight, I recommend staying between .8-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight. I almost always urge people to stay closer to 1g per pound of bodyweight, especially if they are working out on a consistent basis.

If you recall the beginning part of this guide, you'll remember that protein is one of the most under consumed nutrients, especially in individuals that are working out and wanting to change their body composition. The women that come to me seeking to reach a goal are usually eating 50-60g per day, while men are eating anywhere from 70-100g per day. Simply put, it's far too little.

Just for kicks, eat how you normally would and track your food intake for 10-14 days. I bet you're not eating enough protein either.

If you're like these people, falling short of your protein goal each and every day, you may be wondering how in the world you're going to start eating that much more protein each day. Don't worry, we'll get into some tips that I offer to help you eat more protein. But first, let's talk about where the protein should come from.

## WHAT SOURCES CAN I TRUST?

As you may have guessed, I am a big fan of whole, natural foods. All of your food should come from natural sources. Your protein should, too. As much as I'd like to live in a world where we can easily get all of our protein from natural animal sources, I understand that it's a stretch. We are busy, and meat is very filling. I accept that protein powders may need to be used at times. So, let's talk about them.

There are hundreds upon hundreds of different supplement companies that claim their product has the best taste, quality, nutrients, etc. Since supplements aren't heavily regulated by the FDA, it's important to understand what to look for.

When it comes to supplements and more specifically, protein supplements, there is a checklist that I recommend people go through to ensure that they are getting a high quality product. The first item on that list is staying clear of artificial flavors, sweeteners, and colorings. Although there is tons of

controversy on artificial sweeteners, it's best to stay away from them in my opinion. Thankfully, it's getting easier and easier to do so now that the market is calling for more natural products.

The second "to do" on your protein checklist is to check the ingredients on the label of the product. It is extremely important to know what and how much you are consuming. When it comes down to it, there shouldn't be too many ingredients, as all that is needed is protein and natural flavors or sweeteners (like stevia or monk fruit) to bring up the flavor. For those of you that use vegan protein powders, this is key. Many vegan protein powders use tons of additives to improve the taste of their product. Be cautious and read the ingredient label before you buy.

After you've checked the ingredients, do some additional research by investigating into independent and third party lab tests done on the product you're interested in. Having an outside lab test the product will allow you to see if the company is truthful about what's inside. Often times, companies will say a serving has 30 grams of protein when in fact, it has 25g. These companies must be held accountable, and these independent lab tests help them stick to the truth. Labdoor, Consumer Labs, Supplement Guard, and Clean Label Project are all great resources to help verify the validity of the product you're interested in using.

Lastly, keep up with the brand. Take notes of how they present their product. Brands that highlight the nutritional value of their product are usually more inclined to be truthful. Brands that use hype, motivation, and fitness models to promote the value of their product are usually not to be trusted. Note that this is what I've noticed, and not always the truth. Be an intelligent consumer and do your homework.

## HOW TO EAT MORE PROTEIN

Even when protein powders are in the mix, it can be challenging to get .8-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight. So, let's go over some of my tips to eat more protein.

### **Tip #1: Prioritize**

This tip may seem like the most obvious, yet no one does it as much as they should. Prioritizing your protein means putting it on your plate first, and eating it off your plate first. It means prepping your protein for the week and ensuring you'll have enough. Prioritizing is simply planning ahead to make sure you can get your daily amount in. The best thing that my clients do to get enough protein each day is meal planning. Some prep 21 meals for the week, and some prep seven meals for the week. Do whatever will allow you to hit your goals with your budget, your time, and your schedule.



## **Tip #2: 30 in 30**

If you're not a breakfast person, this tip may be hard for you. It's pretty simple, really. All you need to do is eat 30 grams of protein within 30 minutes of waking. Doing this will allow you to get a head start on your protein intake. I like to use yogurt, eggs, or a smoothie to help me get there.

## **Tip #3: Utilize Protein Powder**

Utilize, but do not abuse protein powder. Protein powder is so easy to consume, and it can easily become a replacement for whole natural foods before you know it. Use supplements as a back-up just in case you don't meet your goal through whole foods. If you do use protein powder, make a smoothie with some fruit and veggies.

## **Tip #4: Take it Slow**

Creating lifestyle change is all about creating behavior change. Behavior change is all about turning good choices into habits. If your ideal protein goal is too much for you to reach in the day, that's fine. Reduce the number a bit and slowly increase back up as each amount of protein becomes a habit in your day. For example, make a habit of hitting 100 grams per day before advancing to 120 grams.

## **Tip #5: Focus on What's Practical**

This one is straight forward. You know yourself, your life, your schedule, and your budget better than anybody else. Implement the tools and practices that are practical for you and where you're at.

## **Tip #6: Break it Down**

Eating 150g of protein in the day is extremely daunting. It's not so bad when you realize that it's only thirty grams per meal/snack. Whatever your goal is, divide it by the number of times you eat in the day. Break it up to make it more manageable. Keep in mind, though, if your optimal protein intake is on the higher end, you may need to add more meals or snacks to your day.

# THE TAKEAWAYS

Now that you've read through the guide and gathered information, let's bring everything together with some quick and simple takeaways.

- **Protein plays a key role in the building and maintenance of lean muscle tissue.**
- **Protein can aid your lean muscle tissue, improving your metabolic rate.**
- **Most individuals grossly under-consume protein. Aim for .8-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight unless you are severely overweight or obese.**
- **Get your protein from whole, natural foods like animal products, and use supplements as a back-up.**
- **Do your homework on supplements and make sure you're putting the best quality product and ingredients into your body.**

Follow the tips above to reach your protein goal each and every day.

That's it! You can now implement these takeaways to begin improving your protein intake as well as improve your overall results along your health and fitness journey.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Adam Poehlmann** is a fitness and nutrition coach based in Fort Collins, Colorado. After hanging up the baseball cleats, he found a strong interest in the human body and how it performs. Since then, Adam has been transforming lives through fitness and nutrition in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. As an ACE CPT and Fitness Nutrition Specialist, he is constantly moved to help people improve in all walks of life.