

10 Science-Backed Reasons to Eat More Protein

By Kris Gunnars, HealthLine



The health effects of fat and carbs are controversial. However, almost everyone agrees that protein is important.

Most people eat enough protein to prevent deficiency, but some individuals would do better with a much higher protein intake.

Numerous studies suggest that a high-protein diet has major benefits for weight loss and metabolic health.

Here are 10 science-based reasons to eat more protein.

1. Reduces Appetite and Hunger Levels

The three macronutrients — fats, carbs, and protein — affect your body in different ways.

Studies show that protein is by far the most filling. It helps you feel more full — with less food.

This is partly because protein reduces your level of the hunger hormone ghrelin. It also boosts the levels of peptide YY, a hormone that makes you feel full.

These effects on appetite can be powerful. In one study, increasing protein intake from 15% to 30% of calories made overweight women eat 441 fewer calories each day without intentionally restricting anything.

If you need to lose weight or belly fat, consider replacing some of your carbs and fats with protein. It can be as simple as making your potato or rice serving smaller while adding a few extra bites of meat or fish.

SUMMARY A high-protein diet reduces hunger, helping you eat fewer calories. This is caused by the improved function of weight-regulating hormones.

2. Increases Muscle Mass and Strength

Protein is the building block of your muscles.

Therefore, eating adequate amounts of protein helps you maintain your muscle mass and promotes muscle growth when you do strength training.

Numerous studies show that eating plenty of protein can help increase muscle mass and strength.

If you're physically active, lifting weights, or trying to gain muscle, you need to make sure you're getting enough protein.

Keeping protein intake high can also help prevent muscle loss during weight.

SUMMARY Muscle is made primarily of protein. High protein intake can help you gain muscle mass and strength while reducing muscle loss during weight loss.

3. Good for Your Bones

An ongoing myth perpetuates the idea that protein — mainly animal protein — is bad for your bones.

This is based on the idea that protein increases acid load in the body, leading to calcium leaching from your bones in order to neutralize the acid.

However, most long-term studies indicate that protein, including animal protein, has major benefits for bone health.

People who eat more protein tend to maintain bone mass better as they age and have a much lower risk of osteoporosis and fractures.

This is especially important for women, who are at high risk of osteoporosis after menopause. Eating plenty of protein and staying active is a good way to help prevent that from happening.

SUMMARY People who eat more protein tend to have better bone health and a much lower risk of osteoporosis and fractures as they get older.

4. Reduces Cravings and Desire for Late-Night Snacking

A food craving is different from normal hunger.

It is not just about your body needing energy or nutrients but your brain needing a reward.

Yet, cravings can be incredibly hard to control. The best way to overcome them may be to prevent them from occurring in the first place.

One of the best prevention methods is to increase your protein intake.

One study in overweight men showed that increasing protein to 25% of calories reduced cravings by 60% and the desire to snack at night by half.

Likewise, a study in overweight adolescent girls found that eating a high-protein breakfast reduced cravings and late-night snacking.

This may be mediated by an improvement in the function of dopamine, one of the main brain hormones involved in cravings and addiction.

SUMMARY Eating more protein may reduce cravings and desire for late-night snacking. Merely having a high-protein breakfast may have a powerful effect.

5. Boosts Metabolism and Increases Fat Burning

Eating can boost your metabolism for a short while.

That's because your body uses calories to digest and make use of the nutrients in foods. This is referred to as the thermic effect of food (TEF).

However, not all foods are the same in this regard. In fact, protein has a much higher thermic effect than fat or carbs — 20–35% compared to 5–15%.

High protein intake has been shown to significantly boost metabolism and increase the number of calories you burn. This can amount to 80–100 more calories burned each day.

In fact, some research suggests you can burn even more. In one study, a high-protein group burned 260 more calories per day than a low-protein group. That's equivalent to an hour of moderate-intensity exercise per day.

SUMMARY High protein intake may boost your metabolism significantly, helping you burn more calories throughout the day.

6. Lowers Your Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a major cause of heart attacks, strokes, and chronic kidney disease.

Interestingly, higher protein intake has been shown to lower blood pressure.

In a review of 40 controlled trials, increased protein lowered systolic blood pressure (the top number of a reading) by 1.76 mm Hg on average and diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number of a reading) by 1.15 mm Hg.

One study found that, in addition to lowering blood pressure, a high-protein diet also reduced LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides.

SUMMARY Several studies note that higher protein intake can lower blood pressure. Some studies also demonstrate improvements in other risk factors for heart disease.

7. Helps Maintain Weight Loss

Because a high-protein diet boosts metabolism and leads to an automatic reduction in calorie intake and cravings, many people who increase their protein intake tend to lose weight almost instantly.

One study found that overweight women who ate 30% of their calories from protein lost 11 pounds (5 kg) in 12 weeks — though they didn't intentionally restrict their.

Protein also has benefits for fat loss during intentional calorie restriction.

In a 12-month study in 130 overweight people on a calorie-restricted diet, the high-protein group lost 53% more body fat than a normal-protein group eating the same number of calories.

Of course, losing weight is just the beginning. Maintaining weight loss is a much greater challenge for most people.

A modest increase in protein intake has been shown to help with weight maintenance. In one study, increasing protein from 15% to 18% of calories reduced weight regain by 50%.

If you want to keep off excess weight, consider making a permanent increase in your protein intake.

SUMMARY Upping your protein intake can not only help you lose weight but keep it off in the long term.

8. Does Not Harm Healthy Kidneys

Many people wrongly believe that a high protein intake harms your kidneys.

It is true that restricting protein intake can benefit people with pre-existing kidney disease. This should not be taken lightly, as kidney problems can be very serious.

However, while high protein intake may harm individuals with kidney problems, it has no relevance to people with healthy kidneys.

In fact, numerous studies underscore that high-protein diets have no harmful effects on people without kidney disease.

SUMMARY While protein can cause harm to people with kidney problems, it doesn't affect those with healthy kidneys.

9. Helps Your Body Repair Itself After Injury

Protein can help your body repair after it has been injured.

This makes perfect sense, as it forms the main building blocks of your tissues and organs.

Numerous studies demonstrate that eating more protein after injury can help speed up recovery.

SUMMARY Eating more protein can help you recover faster if you've been injured.

10. Helps You Stay Fit as You Age

One of the consequences of aging is that your muscles gradually weaken.

The most severe cases are referred to as age-related sarcopenia, which is one of the main causes of frailty, bone fractures, and reduced quality of life among older adults.

Eating more protein is one of the best ways to reduce age-related muscle deterioration and prevent sarcopenia.

Staying physically active is also crucial, and lifting weights or doing some sort of resistance exercise can work wonders.

SUMMARY Eating plenty of protein can help reduce the muscle loss associated with aging.

The Bottom Line

Even though a higher protein intake can have health benefits for many people, it is not necessary for everyone.

Most people already eat around 15% of their calories from protein, which is more than enough to prevent deficiency.

However, in certain cases, people can benefit from eating much more than that — up to 25–30% of calories.

If you need to lose weight, improve your metabolic health, or gain muscle mass and strength, make sure you're eating enough protein.