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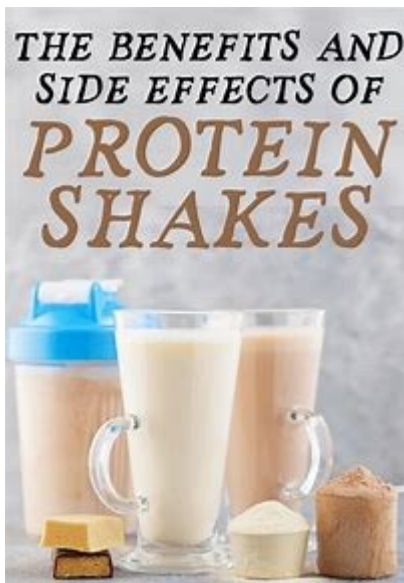
Are Protein Shakes Good For You? A Dietitian Explains

Medically reviewed by Barbie Cervoni MS, RD, CDCES, CDN

Protein is an essential nutrient your body needs to make new cells, repair damaged cells, and build muscle. Because protein is essential, protein shakes should be good for you, right? While they are a convenient way to meet your daily protein needs when consumed in place of a snack or as a post-workout drink, you don't need a protein shake.

You can quickly meet your daily protein needs by eating protein-rich whole foods. Protein is found in a variety of foods including meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, legumes, whole grains, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. But, there are times when a protein shake makes a good choice—like for people who are unable to meet their protein needs because of diet restrictions. Even active individuals trying to build muscle may find protein shakes useful.

There's no formula or definition for what a protein shake must contain. For this article, we are referring to the protein shakes that are pre-packaged, ready-to-drink protein beverages. Read on to learn the nutrition factors for a protein shake, the potential health benefits, the risks of protein shakes, when to drink these shakes, and how to incorporate protein shakes into your diet.



Protein Shake Nutrition Facts:

The nutrition facts for a protein shake vary significantly depending on the type of protein used, added ingredients, and serving size. Below are the nutrition facts for a 1-cup serving (256 grams) of a standard high-protein, ready-to-drink shake. The serving size of a ready-to-drink protein shake may range from 8 ounces (1 cup) to 20 ounces (2.5 cups).

Explainer

- Calories: 156
- Fat: 9 grams
- Protein: 17 grams
- Carbohydrates: 2 grams
- Fiber: 1 gram
- Sodium: 184 milligrams
- Calcium: 333 milligrams
- Potential Health Benefits of Protein Shakes



When part of a balanced diet, protein shakes may offer some health benefits. They also can help you maintain and build muscle mass, recover from your workout, and meet your nutritional needs.

Keep in mind that individual protein needs vary and depend on many factors, such as age, sex, and activity level. Consult with a registered dietitian to find out how much protein you need in a day.

Verdict:

Protein shakes offer some benefits when part of a balanced eating plan. But not everyone needs a shake to meet their protein needs.

May Help to Maintain and Build Muscle:

You need protein to maintain and build muscle. The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for protein for healthy adults is 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight or 0.36 grams of protein per pound. However, you may need more protein to maintain or build muscle if you work out regularly.

Research suggests consuming protein in amounts higher than the RDA (1.4 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (0.64 to 0.73 grams per pound)) is necessary for active individuals who want to maintain or increase muscle mass.

Many active people use protein shakes to supply the additional protein they need. Megan Hilbert, MS, RDN, a registered dietitian with Top Coaching Nutrition says protein shakes help active people looking to build muscle space their protein evenly throughout the day. This helps them optimize absorption and muscle synthesis.

Getting an adequate amount of protein is also necessary for maintaining muscle mass. When inactive and recovering from an injury, athletes need to continue to consume higher amounts of protein so they don't lose too much of their muscle or strength.

May Support Recovery From a Workout:

Many active individuals consume their protein shakes after their workout to support optimal muscle recovery. Though there's some debate about whether it's necessary to have a high-protein snack immediately following a workout, there's no question that your worn muscles need the extra protein to repair and rebuild.

High-quality protein from whole foods and supplements supports the muscle-repairing process. However, the body seems to absorb and utilize whey protein—a high-quality protein found in many protein shakes—faster than other types of protein.

May Help With Weight Management:

Many people follow a high-protein diet for weight management. Eating more protein when trying to reach a healthier weight helps you drop unwanted fat and retain more of your lean muscle.

"Some people also find that consuming protein shakes helps to regulate their appetite and improve weight loss goals," Hilbert says.

Protein triggers the release of appetite-controlling hormones and gives your metabolism a little boost because it takes more energy to digest and metabolize protein. Using protein shakes

as part of a balanced diet for weight loss can help you get the additional protein in a convenient, portion-controlled form.

Helps to Meet Nutritional Needs:

Protein shakes also improve nutrition in people who can't get enough protein from whole food because of diet restrictions or a poor appetite. Following weight-loss surgery, you need to consume 60 to 100 grams of protein a day. Weight-loss surgeries reduce the size of the stomach to limit the amount of food you can eat to help you lose weight. Because of these limitations, protein shakes are commonly used.

Additionally, older adults need higher amounts of protein—1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (0.54 grams per pound)—to maintain nutritional health and prevent muscle loss. Older adults who are unable to meet their higher protein needs with whole food may use protein shakes as a nutritional supplement.

Potential Risks of Protein Shakes:

Protein shakes are readily available and safe for most people. However, you should consult with a healthcare provider before adding any type of dietary supplement to your daily meal plan—especially if you have a chronic health condition like kidney disease or diabetes.

Food Allergies and Intolerances:

You also want to take precautions with protein shakes if you have food allergies. These shakes may use milk, egg, or soy as a source of protein, which are common food allergens.

Some of the added ingredients in a protein shake, such as lactose, also may cause gastrointestinal problems such as abdominal pain, nausea, or diarrhea. If you're lactose intolerant or have food sensitivities, you want to closely read food labels and the ingredients list to find a shake you can tolerate.

Drug Reactions:

These nutritional supplements may also have added vitamins, minerals, or other active ingredients. If you take other dietary supplements like a multivitamin, check with your healthcare provider to make sure you're not getting too much.

Another potential risk of protein shakes is drug-nutrient interactions. You shouldn't combine whey protein shakes with levodopa, a medica-



tion for Parkinson's disease, because it decreases the absorption of the medication.

"Not all protein shakes are created equally," Hilbert warns. "Some are not filled with the most high-quality ingredients and being that protein powders are considered a supplement they are not well-regulated. Some powders have been found to have things like high levels of heavy metals found in them."

When Should You Drink Protein Shakes?

When you drink a protein shake depends on why you're using the nutritional supplement and your protein-intake goals. Because they're quick, easy, and filling, some people choose to drink them for breakfast or as a convenient snack.

You can also drink your shake after your workout. A good post-workout shake should have a mix of protein and carbs to replenish energy stores and supply the nutrients necessary to repair and build muscle.

"For those looking to lose weight, some studies show that consuming protein in the morning can help regulate appetite and prevent over-eating since protein can help suppress your hunger hormones," says Hilbert.

How Many Protein Shakes Should You Drink?

There are no set guidelines for how many protein shakes you should drink a day. The number of shakes you consume depends on your nutritional needs and goals and your usual eating style.

While protein offers many benefits, over time getting too much protein from food or supplements may affect kidney function and bone health. Consult with a healthcare professional to help you determine the amount of protein you need a day and how many protein shakes (if any) you should consume to meet your needs.

Alternatives to Protein Shakes:

Whole foods that provide high-quality protein make a good substitute for protein shakes. Good food sources of protein include:

Explainer:

- 3 ounces of beef, poultry, or seafood: 21 grams of protein
- One large egg: 6 grams of protein
- 1 cup of fresh or frozen edamame: 16 grams of protein
- 1 cup of soy milk: 7 grams of protein

- 1 cup of nonfat cow's milk: 8 grams of protein
- 5 ounces of plain, nonfat Greek yogurt: 12 to 18 grams of protein
- 1/3 cup of cooked quinoa: 6 grams of protein

Protein shakes are safe for most people and offer some benefits. However, you shouldn't rely on them to enhance your health. They work best when part of a balanced eating plan. Always talk to your healthcare provider before adding any type of dietary supplement to your routine.

And remember, what works for one person may not work for you. To determine if protein shakes are good for you, you need to consider your needs, health goals, and how the shakes can best benefit you.

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Unhealthy Foods That Will Do More Harm Than Good! *The Family Nutrition Guide* states that the purpose of food is to fill the body with nutrients. There's a wide variety of healthy foods that serve this purpose. On the other hand, there are tons of unhealthy foods that do the complete opposite. These unhealthy foods are filled with excessive amounts of sugar, fat, sodium, carbohydrates, and more, which can actually harm the body and mind (both in the short and long term). Read on to learn about some of the unhealthiest foods and drinks out there.

According to Healthy Food America, about half of Americans drink soda each day. Soda is one of the unhealthiest foods because of the added sugar, which can have a severe impact on health. Healthline found that the brain doesn't register liquid calories as food, which causes people to consume more than they should.

Side effects from regularly drinking soda include weight gain, tooth decay, a higher risk for type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Fortunately, there are some healthy alternatives to soda, including sparkling flavored water or tea.

Microwave popcorn may seem like a good movie snack, but it contains some harmful chemicals. Many brands fill their popcorn with Trans fats and line the bags with something called perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). This acid is extremely toxic.

Additionally, the butter flavor comes from diacetyl (DA), which is a chemical that breaks down important cells that protect organs. Microwave popcorn is also linked to a serious disease called "popcorn lung" where the diacetyl causes irreversible lung damage after being consumed in large amounts.

Frosting may be a sweet and delicious topping for a cake, but it is extremely harmful to your health. Store-bought frostings contain unhealthy chemicals such as hydrogenated soybean oil and cottonseed oil, which can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, weight gain, liver dysfunction, and infertility.

Nutrition Action says that it also contains dyes filled with carcinogens, which can cause cancer. If that's not enough for you, the propylene glycol used in some frostings has been linked to kidney disease.

Maple syrup is one of the most popular breakfast condiments because of its rich, sweet taste. It also lacks any sort of nutritional value. Store-bought syrup brands include high amounts of high fructose corn syrup and caramel coloring.

High fructose corn syrup leads to liver damage, weight gain, and more, while caramel coloring contains cancer-causing carcinogens. Eat This, Not That! suggests opting for Grade A Medium Amber pure maple syrup because the concentrated flavor causes people to use less.

It seems absurd that brown rice would be considered unhealthy because of its many health benefits. Live Science states it can lower cholesterol, prevent blood clots, and lower the glycemic index. *Eatthismeat.com*

Unhealthy Foods That Will Do More Harm Than Good...

Eat like your life depends on it, because it does!

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