

The Secret to a More Active Metabolism?

Those who aim for a higher-than-normal level of protein consumption can find it hard to get enough of it. Clean, lean sources of protein such as fish, beef, chicken, eggs and turkey usually require some level of preparation, and in our increasingly busy worlds, that is not always an option.

But with the proper planning and the right foods at your disposal, you put yourself at much higher odds of reaching your 33 percent protein goal each day.

Below, I'll make the case for exactly why protein is so important. And then I'll give you a few easy, time-saving ways to incorporate more protein into your meals. The result? If you make the effort to eat more delicious, lean protein in your diet (33 percent of calories—600 calories or 150 g), your effort will be rewarded with a leaner, healthier and altogether more productive body. Forget about better-fitting clothes; a stronger, fitter body will allow you to physically do more in your church, community and home.

Protein Promotes Satiety

Eating well at home is easy. You're in a familiar place, with familiar foods, all prepared to your liking and needs. Where most people get themselves into trouble is out of the house—drive-thrus, lunch trucks and vending machines all present easy ways to satisfy hunger throughout the day. Work, school and play dates are all riddled with nutritional land mines. One way to prevent dietary disaster later in the day is to start your day with a solid, healthy breakfast. And protein has to be a part of it.

In the PrayFit Diet, I discussed the importance of slow-to-be-digested carbohydrate sources such as oatmeal. But there may

be no better breakfast food in the area of weight management than good old-fashioned eggs. With each crack of that shell into a bowl or sizzling-hot pan, you are providing your body a much-needed punch of muscle-friendly protein while also setting yourself up for a full day of dietary restraint.

First thing in the morning, your muscles are starving for amino acids—the building blocks of protein—and eggs provide a quick dose. Just one egg contains 6 grams of protein and all ten essential amino acids. Research presented at the 2012 European Congress on Obesity showed that those who ate eggs for breakfast ended up consuming fewer calories later in the day, particularly at lunch. Another study that pitted eggs against bagels as breakfast food showed similar results—eggs resulted in greater satiety and therefore fewer calories consumed later.

But this gut-filling phenomenon isn't just reserved for the breakfast table. Even though protein contains only 4 calories per gram, your body has to work very hard to digest it—and that takes time. Additional research in the journal *Cell* explains that protein may trigger the stimulation of mu opioid receptors, or MORs, which then signal the stomach to release glucose, curbing appetite. Elsewhere, studies show that those on a low-protein diet—10 percent of total calories—consumed 12 percent more calories over four days than they did on a slightly higher protein intake. Translation: The more healthy protein you take in, the less likely you are to overdo it elsewhere.

To get the most out of this filling effect, the PrayFit Diet advocates having healthy protein throughout the day. To do this, you have to think beyond the chicken breast. Handfuls of nuts, string cheese, cottage cheese and Greek yogurt are all great, protein-heavy snack options to get you from one meal to the next.

Protein Supports Weight Loss

When you consider the various snack-sized options of protein available to you, getting to that goal of 33 percent of your daily calories through protein doesn't seem so daunting. One study in the journal *Nutrition and Metabolism* showed that the amount of protein retained within muscle fibers was best when protein was consumed every three hours. Once you realize how easy it is to feed your body adequately in this department, you're well on your way to improving your overall physique—and you'll hold on to more muscle while continuing to lose body fat.

When you cut back on protein consumption, yes, you are reducing your overall number of calories, but you are also limiting your body's ability to build and repair muscle tissue. This is true across the board, but if you are working out as part of a weight-loss plan, protein shortages will leave you spinning your wheels. Unless you boost consumption of the other macronutrients—which, as we've shown, can lead to disastrous consequences—you're likely to be left with inadequate energy to perform effective workouts. Moreover, you will be limiting your body's ability to effectively repair muscle tissues damaged by exercise.

When you train, your body breaks down muscle fiber via tiny tears. In the 60 to 90 minutes after you exercise, protein synthesis—the process that fixes those tears and then makes them stronger for the next workout—is elevated. If you haven't consumed enough protein for the day, chances are that muscle recovery will suffer and that you will derive significantly less benefit from the sweat that you just worked up.

The good thing about workouts that include resistance is that they harness your body's metabolic furnace by focusing on this cycle of breakdown and repair. Over time, those who strengthen muscles while continuing to lose body fat have the greatest odds of continued success, because muscle burns calories. Protein aids in this process by repairing muscle quickly and completely.

As muscles are rebuilt, they improve in tone, quality and appearance, acting favorably on your lean-tissue-to-fat ratio. This in turn, gives you a metabolic upgrade. For every muscle fiber you tone, you force your body to burn more calories, even at rest. Those who train with resistance—even their own body weight—show higher resting metabolisms in the 24 to 36 hours following a workout than those who only engage in cardiovascular activity.

Over my career, I've had the enormous blessing of serving some of Hollywood's most popular names, including Tyler Perry, Mario Lopez, and LL Cool J. If there's one thing that I've stressed to each of them as I helped them prepare for magazine covers, TV appearances and movie roles, it's that they can't miss their protein.

Let me rephrase that: I wouldn't let them miss their protein. It was my job to ensure they were at their best, and that began and ended with a healthy, balanced influx of protein. The same philosophy I use with my friends in Hollywood, I'm teaching you now.

Bottom line: Want a more active metabolism? Then you need a higher-protein approach to your daily diet.

*This is the final installment of a three-part series. This article was adapted from The PrayFit Diet: The Revolutionary, Faith-Based Plan to Balance Your Plate and Shed Weight by **Jimmy Peña**. Copyright © 2014 by PrayFit, LLC. Reprinted by permission of Touchstone, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.*

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