

Health & Fitness

Power Up With Protein

by Kylie James, CNP, & Joanne Smith, CNP

It seems you can't watch sports on TV or surf the Internet for fitness information without getting blasted by ads touting protein products.

However, those commercials don't explain all you need to know about protein and you certainly don't hear how important it is for people with spinal-cord injury or disease (SCI/D).

Along with fat and carbohydrates, protein is a "macronutrient," meaning

- It helps build and repair tissues, which is important after a workout or game
- Protein helps make enzymes, hormones and other chemicals that help your body function efficiently
- It's a building block of bones, muscles, cartilage, skin and blood

HOW MUCH DO I NEED?

To make sure you're getting the right amount of protein multiply your body weight in kilograms (kg) by 0.8 and you'll get the daily grams of protein

sis means the body converts from burning carbs for fuel to burning its own fat.

When fat is broken down, small bits of carbon called ketones are released into the bloodstream as energy sources. Ketones require lots of water to help eliminate them from the body and this can be taxing on your kidneys and cause excess water to be excreted, resulting in dehydration. Although a perk of this is weight loss, it's not healthy or sustainable over the long term.

There's evidence to suggest that people who eat high-protein diets typically



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the body needs relatively large amounts of it. But unlike fat and carbohydrates, the body doesn't store protein and has no reservoir to draw on when it needs more.

Getting enough protein in your diet is important because it provides plenty of health benefits.

- Protein helps make antibodies to boost the immune system, which is often compromised in people with SCI/D
- It helps make neurotransmitters to help you feel happy, sleep, think clearly and remember things
- Protein helps with growing strong and healthy hair and nails

you need each day ($0.8 \times$ your weight in kilograms = grams of protein). (To get your weight in kilograms, multiply pounds by .45.)

If you have a pressure sore, you need to increase your protein intake by 1.2–1.5 grams per kg of body weight and if you're doing a lot of weightlifting you may want to increase your protein intake to assist with muscle repair and development.

DON'T OVERDO IT

Although protein is extremely important, too much of it can be detrimental.

When people eat lots of protein, but few carbohydrates, their metabolism changes into a state called ketosis. Keto-

excrete excess calcium in their urine, says Deborah Sellmeyer, MD, assistant professor of medicine and director of the Center for Osteoporosis at the University of California-San Francisco.

This suggests that the body is releasing stores of calcium into the bloodstream to counteract an increase in acids caused by protein consumption. Too much calcium loss can lead to osteoporosis and this is an issue for people with SCI/D as the incident of osteoporosis within that group is 88%.

MIX UP YOUR SOURCES

When it comes to the best sources of protein, be careful where it comes from.



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Eat red meat no more than once or twice a week. Red meat contains saturated fat, which can be inflammatory to the body and bodies with SCI/D are often in a constant low-grade inflammation state.

Good sources of protein include a combination of both meat sources and vegetarian sources. Some examples of these are listed below:

- Brown or wild rice
- Beans and lentils
- Dark, leafy greens
- Nuts and seeds
- Greek yogurt
- Goat and feta cheese
- Fish
- Chicken and turkey
- Quinoa
- Hummus
- Protein powders



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CHOOSING A GOOD PROTEIN POWDER

When it comes to the last item on that list, not all powders are created equal. Make sure to get a good one.

Whey is the most quickly absorbed protein and helps with developing lean

muscle mass. If you're going to choose a whey protein make sure it is Cross Flow Micro filtration Whey isolate as opposed to whey concentrate.

Whey isolates tend to have a higher concentration of protein with less lactose and fat than concentrate. However, Marc Perry, CSCS, CPT, says whey isolate can cause a rise in insulin, so if you struggle with diabetes or blood sugar imbalances you may want to avoid this one.



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Make sure your whey protein powder isn't loaded with a bunch of different sweeteners such as sucralose, dextrose or maltodextrin. Instead go for unsweetened or naturally sweetened with stevia. It's helpful to have your protein powder contain immunoglobulins, which help boost the immunity that can become compromised in athletes with SCI/D.

If you happen to be lactose intolerant, then look at vegan protein powders. They don't have lactose like whey does, but they're not absorbed as quickly into the body.

For more information, visit eatwelllivewellwithsci.com.

Kylie James, CNP, and Joanne Smith, CNP, are co-authors of the Paralyzed Veterans of America-supported book Eat Well, Live Well with Spinal Cord Injury.

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