



CAN PROTEIN HELP ME LOSE WEIGHT?

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Type “diet” into google and 963 million results instantly appear. This doesn’t shock me in the slightest. More and more individuals are following crazy “diets” to look and feel better. With continued excitement for eating low-carb, high fat or Paleo diets – diets that have a higher protein intake – the popularity of protein is on a reigning high. You may question why this macronutrient is gaining popularity? Let’s take a closer look.

PROTEIN FOR INTENTIONAL WEIGHT LOSS

When trying to lose weight we need to consume less calories than what our bodies use. A higher intake of protein is usually seen as a good idea due to preserving lean mass during the weight loss period. Let’s see how this all works.

1. Protein at breakfast

We all know that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Studies have shown that eating breakfast assists with long-term weight control, even more so if the breakfast included a protein. Protein helped individuals to reduce their calorie intake later in the day¹.

2. Protein and weight regulating hormones

Protein increases levels of satiety. Satiety is the feeling of fullness and the suppression of hunger for a period, after a meal is ingested². Feelings of satiety can influence how much and how soon we eat next. There are several bodily signals that begin when food or drinks are consumed. These are regulated by the hypothalamus area in your brain¹. Hormones are signalled to your brain in response to feeding. A higher-protein intake increases levels of satiety by releasing hormones namely GLP-1, peptide YY and cholecystokinin which are appetite suppressing hormones and reduce levels of our hunger hormone, ghrelin^{1,3,4,5}. Individuals then consume less calories as they feel less hungry⁴.

3. Thermic effect of protein

Have you ever heard of the thermic effect of food (TEF)? The TEF is the amount of energy needed to absorb and digest food. Different macronutrients have different thermic effects. The thermic effect of protein (20-30%) is higher than carbohydrates (5-10%) and fats (0-3%)⁵. This means that protein uses more energy (calories) for absorption, digestion and storage. This has shown to assist in weight management- what a bargain!



4. Protein helps reduce cravings

Protein helps to reduce cravings not only due to the satiety effect mentioned above but because protein helps to lower the GI of foods consumed. Lower GI foods help to keep us fuller for longer and give us slow, sustained energy. A study showed that protein helps to decrease cravings and late-night snacking by consuming 25% of your energy from protein. Cravings were decreased by 60% and late-night snacking by half⁸.

5. How much protein is enough

For healthy adults the WHO recommends 0.8g/kg/day or 15-20% of your total energy⁷. A high-protein diet is one that contains 25-30% of total energy from protein⁸. Although many studies have shown that protein can assist with weight loss, we need to remember that protein from animal sources can often be high in fat which can lead to heart problems. High-protein diets are often low in carbohydrates. These types of diets often give short-term weight loss results and long-term evidence on the negative effects or safety of consuming a high-protein diets are not yet available⁵.

CONCLUSION

Protein does help increase satiety, decrease appetite and food cravings and has the highest thermic effect. All these factors can assist you on your weight loss journey, but instead on focusing solely on one macronutrient we would rather want to focus on eating a balanced diet, that includes a variety of foods and eat unhealthy foods in moderation. A more permanent solution is to make a lifestyle change. Eat low-fat, high fibre foods including lots of fruits and vegetables, unprocessed grains and cereals, plant proteins, fish, chicken and lean meats and exercise on a regular basis. These lifestyle changes will help improve overall health.

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