

Despite America's Protein Craze, Adults Are Still Missing the Mark According to New Study

- Research reveals more than 1 in 3 Americans 50+ aren't meeting the recommended protein intake and it's saying a lot about their diets and health
 - Timing matters – eating protein evenly throughout the day, and even before bedtime, can support muscles for optimal health
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ABBOTT PARK, Ill., February 20, 2019 — Walk into any grocery store and you'll find high-protein products dominating shelf space throughout the aisles. The benefits of protein are well established, and it's widely recognized as a key nutrient to a healthy, active lifestyle. However, despite its popularity, a new study published in *The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*, shows that more than 1 in 3 adults 50-plus are missing the mark on protein, and it's saying a lot about their overall diet and health.¹

Using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), researchers from The Ohio State University and Abbott evaluated protein intake in relation to diet patterns and functional outcomes in 11,680 adults aged 51 and older. The analysis revealed that protein consumption is a strong indicator of adults' overall diet, nutrition and physical well-being:

- **Shortcutting protein is hurting your diet:** Adults who weren't getting enough protein had overall poorer quality diets – they ate less healthy foods like greens, beans, dairy and seafood, and weren't consuming enough of other important vitamins and minerals like choline, vitamin C, zinc and vitamin D.
- **Meal skipping may be part of the problem:** More than 40 percent of adults who did not meet the protein recommendation ate fewer than three meals per day.
- **Adults are majorly missing the mark:** Of those not meeting their protein intake, one third were up to 30 grams of protein short per day. For a 160-pound healthy adult, who needs at least 58 grams of protein a day, this is more than half of their daily needs.²
- **Protein signals strength and energy:** Those not meeting the protein recommendation were more likely to encounter physical limitations, such as sitting for long periods or getting into or out of bed.

"Despite the protein craze in America, the data shows there's still a big gap in adults' protein intake," said Christopher A. Taylor, Ph.D., R.D., associate professor at The Ohio State University and study author. "Not only were they significantly lacking, but this research was looking at intake against current dietary recommendations, which don't take into consideration activity, age and illness, when adults may need even more protein."

MAKING PROTEIN A PRIORITY

Getting the right amount of protein daily is critical, but when and how often it's consumed also has a major impact on health. Research shows the benefits of spacing protein intake throughout the day. For example, a study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that spreading protein more evenly across three meals a day can help adults increase muscle strength.³ Studies also suggest that before bed snacking may not be a bad habit if it includes protein.⁴ A study published in *The Journal of Nutrition* concluded a pre-bedtime snack with 40 grams of protein had a positive effect on muscle health in older men.⁵

"The power of protein is sometimes underestimated," said Abby Sauer, M.P.H., R.D., registered dietitian at Abbott and healthy aging expert. "As the building blocks of our muscles, protein plays a role in every aspect of our lives – from providing energy to run 5 km, to giving us strength to get out of a hospital bed. There are simple steps adults can take – like including protein at each meal – that will have a long-lasting impact on overall health."

Luckily, eating enough protein at the right times and getting regular exercise, can help preserve muscle strength and function.³ While experts agree that adults need more protein as they age,⁶ upping your protein doesn't have to be hard:

- **Add protein-toppers to meals:** Spread hummus on your turkey sandwich, add diced chicken to your pasta or toss beans into your salad.
- **Snack on protein:** Instead of reaching for a handful of pretzels, opt for a protein option like nuts, Greek yogurt or string cheese.
- **Scrutinize your plate:** Make sure you are including protein foods, like chicken, seafood, eggs, nuts, beans or dairy, and aim for about 25-30 grams per meal. For example, 30 grams of protein equals a cup of turkey chili topped with shredded cheese and a whole wheat roll.
- **Incorporate nutrition drinks:** Protein shakes, such as Abbott's [Ensure Max Protein](#), are a great option for adults who aren't able to get enough protein through food or need an easy, on-the-go option.
- **Amp up intake if you're 65+:** Some adults may need up to two times more protein than younger adults,⁴ so add in protein snacks, like one before bed or supplement your diet if needed.

To learn more about protein and for additional tips for increasing your daily intake, visit [Abbott's Nutrition Newsroom](#).

About the Study

Low Dietary Protein Intakes and Associated Dietary Patterns and Functional Limitations in an Aging Population: a NHANES Analysis was published in *The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*. The aim of the study was to investigate protein intake in relation to dietary patterns and functional outcomes in older Americans. Data from the 2005-2014 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) was used to look at 11,680 adults. Adults were classified as either meeting or not meeting the protein recommendation based on the recommended daily allowance (0.8 g/kg/d) to compare demographics, diet quality with Healthy Eating Index-2015, functional limitations and other dietary intakes.

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¹ Krok-Schoen JL, et al. *J Nutr Health Aging*.2019;e-pub ahead of print.

² Otten JJ, et al. DRI, dietary reference intakes: The essential guide to nutrient requirements. 2006

³ Farsijani S, et al. *Am J Clin Nutr*.2017;106(1):113-124.

⁴ Kerksick CM, et al. *J Int Soc Sports Nutr*.2017;14:33.

⁵ Kouw IW, et al. *J Nutr*.2017;147(12):2252-2261.

⁶ Deutz NE, et al. *Clin Nutr*. 2014;33(6):929-36.