

[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

Why You Definitely Need to Eat Protein After You Work Out

Let's face it: The fitness world is full of controversy. What should you be eating? What type of exercise should you be doing? How often should you work out, and for how long? The list of shoulds and shouldn'ts goes on and on.

But one fact that has (for the most part) stayed true across the board is that after a workout, your body needs protein ASAP.

This piece of advice has stuck with me because it's something I still struggle to with. After a long and exhausting run or lifting some weights, my thoughts are usually "I should stretch now" or "Wow, I'm really tired." Food is, surprisingly, the last thing on my mind. I do my best to nibble on a clean protein bar or whip up a quick protein powder and almond milk shake, but I usually spend the time following my workouts stretching, lying on the ground, or rushing to get ready for work. Taking the time to eat something post-workout, for whatever reason, just doesn't come naturally to me.



So what happens when you don't eat protein after you work out? Are you destined to deteriorate? How will your body react? I decided to ask Jaime Schehr, N.D., R.D., a nationally recognized expert in integrative medicine and nutrition, what she recommends to her patients and what risks you run by delaying your post-workout protein.

Should you consume protein post-workout, and if so, how much?

Schehr does recommend to her patients that they consume protein after exercising. Here are her typical guidelines:

"It's generally recommended that post-workout protein be consumed within the first hour after finishing a workout. This varies for men and women—women should aim to consume protein within the first 30 minutes, while men should do so within 60 minutes. Ideally, women should aim for 10 to 20 grams post-workout, and men 30 to 40 grams."

The good news? Your post-workout sustenance can take whatever form you like—you have tons of options. As I mentioned, most of the time I just mix almond milk with a vegan protein powder because it's the easiest to get down when I'm not hungry. That said, sometimes I'll make a full-on protein smoothie (protein, frozen fruit, spinach, MCT oil, etc.), which keeps me fuller much longer. If I'm going out to eat or preparing a meal within that

first post-workout hour, I make sure it's full of healthy protein and vegetables. If I'm running around and need something quick, I'll snag a plain-flavored yogurt or some hard-boiled eggs from a grocery store or salad bar-esque eatery.

Why is eating protein post-workout so important?

According to Schehr, "Dietary proteins are made up of amino acids, which are largely responsible for both muscle building and muscle repair. And exercise (strength training in particular), although beneficial to building muscle, works by creating microscopic tears or damage to the existing muscle. The protein we eat, in turn, gets broken down into amino acids, which supplies the nutrients needed for repair of these damages."

In short, we need protein after a workout to support the healing of our muscles. Makes sense right?

What happens when you don't eat protein post-workout?

As Schehr said, protein is essential to muscle repair. So in theory, not eating protein post-workout means that your muscles don't have what they need to efficiently and successfully repair. Schehr confirmed this, saying, "When protein isn't present in adequate amounts, the muscle is not able to fully repair and grow, which leads to inflammation and an increased risk for injury." Naturally, she explains, this inability to repair is the culprit for many overuse injuries that people (including myself) suffer from: "Many overuse injuries occur from a lack of the proper repair nutrients (aka amino acids from proteins) the body needs to support muscle and tendons and reduce inflammation."

The take-aways.

If you take anything away here, it's that eating protein post-workout is one thing you can do to minimize your risk of injury, recover faster, and keep your body as healthy as possible. It's as simple (and expert-approved) as that!

Learn more at simpleagain.com