

THE MIGHTEST MACRO

FITNESS FLYER

By Owen Rothstein

Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Any guesses on what this article is about? Yup, it's about Protein. We're in the business of selling protein, so it really isn't a surprise that we'd write a piece advocating the benefits of protein, but that isn't the driver for this article. As a primer, and in case you don't already know, there are 3 macronutrients (macros) in nutrition – protein, fat and carbohydrates.

I'm 45 years old, and throughout my life I've seen quite a few different diets emerge. When I was about 8 or 9, my chronically overweight father was placed on a medically supervised liquid protein diet. He eliminated a couple of meals a day and, in their place, drank this high-protein liquid. At 5'6", he went from about 250 to 195 pounds on this diet. It is my earliest recollection of the word protein.

In years to come, the nation would become obsessed with diets that focused on reducing or eliminating specific macros. It started with no-fat diets. Fat in foods were demonized as being the cause for fat in the body. Hey, it makes sense...I get why people would believe that. That lasted as a focus for several decades, with food manufacturers capitalizing on the trend and coming out with reduced or nonfat versions of just about everything under the sun. Forgetting for a moment that most important vitamins are fat soluble (fat helps your body absorb them), the idea of 98% fat-free bacon is just mystifying. The myth about fat-free products being a healthy choice has eroded, but still persists to this day.

The next macro to come under fire was carbohydrates (carbs). Thanks to Dr. Atkins (among others) and most American's desire for a magic bullet, the primary energy source for every human body on the planet was now the bad guy. "Tricking" your body into believing that it was starving, by depriving it of its energy source, thus forcing it to burn fat for energy (a process called ketosis) became a thing. This was the complete opposite of fat-free bacon...this was eat all of the fatty bacon in the world and you'll still lose weight. It didn't make as much natural sense as a low-fat diet, but that sure sounds appealing to me. Despite the short-term effectiveness of these diets, there is dangerous potential for long-term cardiovascular damage and increased risks for dieters with underlying liver or kidney issues.

In a recent study of low-fat vs. low-carb diets by the National Institute of Health (NIH), which was peer-reviewed and highly regarded for meticulous execution, the results were surprising. I'll skip the details (Google it if you're interested), but the results were that both diets had similar results and the net loss from both was a bit depressing. Both diets kind of work short-term, but long-term, not so much.

Finally, we get back to protein. Nobody has ever suggested that there be a low-protein diet. In fact (remember my father's diet), it turns out that protein may, in fact, be the mightiest macro of them all to not only look better, but to feel better too.

Protein has a lot of functions in the body. First and foremost, protein is considered the building block for cellular and tissue repair and maintenance. You are made of mostly water and protein. Hormones are made from protein, enzymes are protein and proteins are even used to transport molecules throughout the body (e.g. hemoglobin is a protein that transports oxygen).

Protein is an undoubtedly important nutrient, but where does its intake fit into nutrition? Well, because protein is the building-block of all cells, the quality of the source of protein is extremely important. Better protein source equals better cells. Better cells equals better you. There are tons of websites out there with recommendations for required protein depending on your age, body type and goals. Find a source that you trust and then add about 5%-10% to those numbers. My general philosophy is that (with the exception of processed foods), you shouldn't focus on eliminating things from your diet, like the low-fat or low-carb diet approach suggests. Rather, you should focus on adding things to your diet instead. In this case, you're just adding more protein.

Additionally, protein isn't really stored by your body and needs to be continually replaced. Through all of the current science that we've read, we believe that protein should be present in every meal or snack that you eat. Whenever my grandmother served a meal, there was protein, carbs and some fat on the plate. It was the right way to eat then and it's the right way to eat now.

Finally, there are two specific times that taking in specific quantities of protein are particularly important. The first is post-workout or exercise. When you exercise, your body breaks down tissue and will need a dose of protein to repair and rebuild. This is why fitness experts suggest that a post-workout recovery shake with whey protein (and some carbs for energy) is a good idea.

The second ideal time for protein intake, perhaps surprisingly, is before bedtime. A recent study by the American Society for Nutrition found that your body processes protein almost as effectively as post-workout, while you sleep. Additionally, they found that your body does not effectively process carbs or fats well while you sleep. So, if you're going to have a late-night snack, protein is the way to go. My choice would be for about 100-150 calories worth of something yummy and protein-rich like cottage cheese, peanut butter, Greek yogurt or maybe a small smoothie with whey or casein protein.

Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Protein. Keep it on the top of your mind and in every meal or snack you eat.



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