



THE ONLY SUPPLEMENTS YOU NEED TO GET THE BODY YOU WANT.

HOW TO FIND THE BEST PROTEIN POWDER FOR YOU



“If you want to build muscle faster, you should get some protein powder.”

That’s the first bit of supplement advice I ever got. And it’s wrong.

Protein powder doesn’t directly help you build muscle faster.

Eating enough protein does, but you don’t need powders to get there. Whole foods alone can give you everything you need.

Protein powder doesn’t help you lose fat faster, either. A high-protein diet does, regardless of whether it includes protein supplements or not.

Why, then, are protein supplements so popular? And which are best for what and why?

Well, that’s what we’re going to discuss in this article. And by the end, you’ll know whether you should be taking a protein supplement or not and which best suits your needs.

Let’s get to it.

DO YOU NEED A PROTEIN POWDER?

You already know that protein powder per se doesn’t help you build muscle or lose fat faster.

Why, then, would you need one? Are protein supplements just shams like “fat burners,” “muscle builders,” and most others? Not quite.

Protein powders are often overhyped by supplement companies but they do have a legitimate value and use.

You see, you have plenty of high-quality foods to choose from to get your protein such as meat, seafood, dairy, eggs, legumes, and certain grains and seeds.

That said, attempting to get all the protein you need from food alone presents several challenges:

- ✔ It can make balancing your macronutrient intake tricky.
- ✔ It can be quite time consuming (shopping, prepping, cooking, cleaning up, etc.).
- ✔ Lugging around pre-made meals can be inconvenient.

- ✓ Eating large amounts of a small variety of high-protein foods can get old, fast.

Enter the protein powder, which is...

- ✓ Perfect for fast-and-easy snacking.
- ✓ Often preferable to having to eat another meal.
- ✓ Usually low in carbs and fat, which is great for meal planning purposes.
- ✓ Quite affordable in terms of price per gram of protein.

These are the main reasons why protein powders are the most popular types of supplements out there.

THE BEST TYPES OF PROTEIN POWDERS

If you're having trouble deciding on a protein powder, you're not alone.

There are just too many options and sales pitches. Then there are the "little" things that are supposed to make certain protein powders better or worse than others like...

- ✓ Additional amino acids and digestive enzymes.
- ✓ Simple carbs like dextrose and sucrose.
- ✓ Artificial sweeteners.
- ✓ Other strange chemicals that we can't hope to pronounce.

Well, let's start with some simple criteria that we can judge protein powders by.

Personally, I would only consider buying a protein powder that has a good macronutrient profile (high in protein and low in carbs and fats) and a minimal amount of artificial ingredients and that tastes good and mixes well and is reasonably priced.

I'd rather not "waste" carbs and fats on powders when I could get them all from tasty foods.

And while artificial sweeteners may not be as harmful as some people claim, studies have shown that they may indeed cause harmful effects in the body. Until further research is done, I think it's smartest to limit our consumption.

So, let's see how the most popular types of protein powders measure up against that yardstick.

THE BEST TYPES OF WHEY PROTEIN POWDER

When it comes to protein supplements, whey protein is the king of the mountain.

It's by far the number one bestseller in the space and it's particularly popular among athletes and weightlifters...and for good reason.

Whey protein powders give you a high amount of protein per dollar, they generally taste pretty good, and their amino acid profile is particularly good for people trying to improve their body composition (more on that in a second).

What is Whey Protein?

Whey is a semi-clear, liquid byproduct of cheese production. After curdling and straining milk, whey is left over.

Whey used to be considered a worthless byproduct of dairy processing but eventually its high protein content was discovered.

Scientists also discovered that whey is particularly rich in the amino acid leucine, which plays a vital role in stimulating protein synthesis.

Well, when sport supplement companies caught on to this research, the whey protein supplement was born.

Why Are There Different Types of Whey Protein?

The three forms of whey protein sold are whey concentrate, isolate, and hydrolysate.

Whey concentrate is the least processed form and cheapest to manufacture, and it contains some fat and lactose. Whey concentrates range from 35 – 80% protein by weight, depending on quality.

Whey isolate is a form of whey protein that's further processed to remove the fat and lactose. Whey isolates are 90%+ protein by weight and as they cost more to manufacture than whey concentrates, they cost more for consumers too.

Whey hydrolysate is a form of whey protein that has been “hydrolyzed,” which is a process that breaks down amino acid chains into smaller “chunks” for easier digestion. A whey hydrolysate can be created from everything from the lowest quality whey concentrate to the highest quality whey isolate. The process of hydrolysis is what distinguishes it as a hydrolysate, not the inherent quality of the protein itself.

Most whey hydrolysates on the market are made from pure whey isolate or a blend of isolate and concentrate. As you can guess, whey hydrolysate is the most expensive of the three options.

Which Type of Whey Protein Powder Should You Buy?

Supplement marketers often tell us that we will see better results with whey isolate or hydrolysate than concentrate, but there’s insufficient evidence to support these claims.

That said, choosing the cheapest whey you can find, which will always be a concentrate, isn’t always a good idea, either.

A high-quality whey concentrate is somewhere around 80% protein by weight, but inferior concentrates can be as little as 30%. And if a protein is only 30% protein by weight, what comprises the remaining 70%?

One of the benefits of choosing a pure whey isolate powder is you know that you’re getting something very close to pure protein with minimal additives.

Another significant benefit is the removal of lactose, which means better digestibility and fewer upset stomachs.

You should also know that the old “you get what you pay for” saw is particularly true with whey protein powders. I can tell you firsthand that producing a top-drawer whey protein powder isn’t cheap and if you’re paying less than \$12 to 15 per pound, you’re probably buying junk.

Every day I get calls and emails from overseas suppliers of whey with shockingly low prices, and if I didn’t care about the quality of my products, I could double or even triple my margins by using one of them.

On the other hand, just because a whey protein is expensive doesn’t necessarily mean it’s worth it. A common ploy used by disreputable supplement companies is starting with a low-quality concentrate, adding small amounts of isolate and hydrolysate to create an expensive “blend,” and then calling attention to the isolate and hydrolysate in the marketing and packaging.

A good way to protect yourself as a consumer is to check ingredient lists and serving sizes and amounts of protein per serving before buying.

Ingredients are listed in descending order according to predominance by weight. That means that there's more of the first ingredient than the second, more of the second than the third, and so forth.

So, when you're considering buying a whey protein powder, look at the order in which the ingredients are listed and the amount of protein per scoop relative to the scoop size.

If a product has maltodextrin (a filler), or any other ingredient, listed before the protein powder, don't buy it. That means there's more maltodextrin, creatine, or other fillers in it than protein powder.

If a scoop is 40 grams but there is only 22 grams of protein per serving, don't buy it unless you know that the other 18 grams are made up of stuff you want. In many cases it's not.

A worthy whey protein powder is easy to spot:

- ✔ Whey concentrate, isolate, or hydrolysate are listed as the first ingredients.
- ✔ The scoop size is relatively close to the amount of actual protein per scoop (it'll never match because there are sweetener, flavoring, and excipients in every serving).

My Favorite Whey Protein Powder

My favorite type of whey protein is whey isolate.

It doesn't upset my stomach like some whey concentrates and I like the fact that it's basically pure protein and little else.

And that's why, when it came time to create my own protein powder, I chose 100% whey protein isolate. I also use 100% natural sweeteners and flavoring.

THE BEST CASEIN PROTEIN POWDER

As you know, casein is another form of protein found in milk. The curds that form as milk coagulates are casein.

Casein protein is digested slower than whey, which results in a slower, steadier release of amino acids into the blood.

There's an ongoing debate about whether whey or casein is better for muscle building purposes, but here's what most reputable experts agree on:

- ✔ Whey's rapid digestion and abundance of leucine makes it an ideal choice for post-workout nutrition.
- ✔ Casein is good for general supplementation needs and is just as good as whey for muscle building purposes.
- ✔ Casein may or may not be as good post-workout as whey—the jury's still out on this one.
- ✔ You can speed up muscle recovery by having 30 to 40 grams of a slow-burning protein like casein before bed.

THE BEST EGG PROTEIN POWDER

Egg protein isn't nearly as popular as whey and casein but it's one of my favorite types of protein powders. I like it so much for three reasons:

- ✔ It has a high "biological value."

The biological value of a protein is a measurement of how efficiently your body can absorb and utilize it. As you can imagine, high-BV proteins are best for building muscle, and animal research suggests that egg is as effective as whey for this purpose.

- ✔ Egg protein is digested very slowly (even slower than casein).

This means that egg is good for all-around supplementation, including before you go to bed.

There's also evidence that slow-burning proteins are better for muscle growth over the long term, but I don't think the research is strong enough to really know one way or the other.

✓ Egg protein powder has little-to-no fat and carbohydrate.

Egg protein powder is made from egg white so it's naturally more or less carb- and fat-free. This means more macros for your food.

THE BEST PLANT PROTEIN POWDERS

The protein found in many plants, vegetables, and grains such as rice, hemp, and pea is often thought of as inferior to animal proteins.

The most common charge leveled against plant proteins is that they're "incomplete" and thus aren't suitable for meeting the body's protein needs. This is a myth.

Research shows that all protein found in plants and vegetables is "complete." That is, it contains all the same amino acids as animal proteins.

Where plant proteins can be inferior, though, is in their amino acid profiles and how well they're absorbed in the body. Some forms of plant protein are lower in essential amino acids than others and some are better absorbed by the body than others.

This just means that if you want to get a significant amount of your protein from plants, grains, seeds, vegetables, and the like, you need to be more discriminating than an omnivore.

The Scoop on Soy Protein

According to some research, regular intake of soy foods has feminizing effects in men due to estrogen-like molecules found in soybeans called isoflavones.

Now, in the case of women, research shows that it is less likely to negatively affect your hormones.

There are other things to consider, however.

Studies show that soy protein contains substances that inhibit the digestion of protein molecules and the absorption of other nutrients, as well as several known allergens.

While there is evidence that soy might have special benefits for women such as reducing the risk of heart disease and breast cancer, other studies cast doubt on these findings. And to the contrary, soy can even stimulate the growth of cancer cells.

The bottom line is if you want to supplement with a protein powder several times per day, I recommend you go with something other than soy.

The Scoop on Rice Protein

You may not think much of the protein found in rice—or even knew it contained any—but it's actually quite viable. Rice protein has a high biological value of about 80% (similar to beef) and a robust amino acid profile very similar to soy's.

I also think rice protein tastes great and really like the texture (it goes down easily).

The Scoop on Pea Protein

Pea protein is even more of an unsung hero of plant proteins than rice.

It has a high biological value (about the same as beef's as well) and, like whey, it also has a large amount of leucine. This makes it great for muscle building purposes, and when you combine pea protein with rice protein, you get what's often called the "vegan's whey."

This is because the amino acid profiles of pea and rice protein are very complementary and, together, look a lot like whey protein's.

In terms of a specific product recommendation, check out our 100% vegan protein powder THRIVE, as it contains 23 grams of pea protein in every serving.

The Scoop on Hemp Protein

Hemp protein is more popular than rice and pea protein but it shouldn't be. It's highly nutritious but only about 30 to 50% protein by weight, which means it comes with quite a bit of carbohydrate and fat.

Furthermore, hemp protein isn't absorbed nearly as well as rice or pea protein, making it even less useful as a protein supplement.

That's why I look at hemp protein powders more as whole foods than protein supplements and don't really recommend or use them.

IS THERE A BEST PROTEIN POWDER FOR WEIGHT LOSS?

When you see a company claiming that a supplement or food helps you lose weight faster, you should immediately be skeptical.

From a marketing standpoint, the easiest way to increase the sales of any product is to associate it with weight loss.

Hence weight loss pills, weight loss pre-workout drinks, weight loss protein bars, weight loss protein powder, and the like. The truth, though, is most of that stuff won't do much of anything. No individual food can cause you to lose weight faster.

The best protein powders for weight loss would be those that are as close to pure protein as possible.

Generally speaking, when you're dieting to lose fat, you want to drink as few calories as possible. The problem with drinking calories is it doesn't trigger satiety (fullness) like food does.

You can drink 1,000 calories and be hungry an hour later, whereas eating 1,000 calories of food, including a good portion of protein and fiber, will probably keep you full for 5 to 6 hours.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON THE BEST PROTEIN POWDERS

You now know everything you need to make good, informed choices about what protein powder will be best for you. If you're like me and like to keep things simple, get a whey protein and use a few scoops per day and get the rest of your protein from food.

Real science. Real supplements. Real results.
Get the results you want when you shop our line of bodybuilding,
pre-workout and weight loss stacks and supplements.

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