

# **Busy americans can reap health benefits by balancing protein intake throughout the day**

April 30 2015, by Sarah Clinton

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Heather Leidy and her colleagues conducted a review of the current scientific literature on protein consumption and found that a moderate increase in protein consumption at each meal, balanced throughout the day, can lead to significant improvements. Credit: University of Missouri

Research has shown that eating more protein can support weight loss and prevent weight gain by boosting metabolism, increasing feelings of fullness and helping the body retain muscle while losing fat. However, many Americans are not consuming enough protein in a balanced way to achieve these effects. University of Missouri researcher Heather Leidy and her colleagues conducted a review of the current scientific literature on protein consumption and found that a moderate increase in protein consumption at each meal, balanced throughout the day, can lead to significant improvements.

To help individuals integrate more [protein](#) into their diets, Leidy, an assistant professor in the MU Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, provides several recommendations based on her and others' research:

**\* Eat breakfast.**

"Breakfast, in general, provides benefits for appetite control and satiety, or feelings of fullness," Leidy said. "Eating a protein-rich breakfast containing about 30 grams of protein leads to even greater satiety throughout the day and can reduce unhealthy snacking by improving [appetite control](#)."

**\*Evenly distribute protein intake throughout the day.**

Leidy said individuals should aim for a diet that contains 1.2 - 1.6 grams

of protein per kilogram of body weight. For example, a 150-pound woman who wants to lose weight or prevent [weight gain](#) should eat approximately 90-100 grams of protein a day.

"This amount of protein has been shown to promote weight and fat losses while preserving lean mass," Leidy said. "Additionally, new evidence also indicates that spreading this amount evenly throughout the day is important. Thus, eating approximately 30 grams of high-quality protein at each meal appears to be necessary for these benefits."

**\* Plan ahead.**

Leidy said that individuals may think eating 30 grams of protein for breakfast sounds too difficult, but planning ahead can make it easier to accomplish.

"Most people eat enough protein in the evening," Leidy said. "Take whatever source of protein you ate for dinner - whether that's a steak or a pork chop - and eat it for breakfast along with Greek yogurt or include it in a pre-made breakfast casserole with eggs, which can easily get you to 30 grams of protein in the morning."

**\*Add a little protein to every meal, especially at breakfast and lunch.**

"We want people to know that they don't have to consume impractical amounts of protein," Leidy said. "Although most Americans don't consume the amount of protein necessary to achieve benefits, such as increased feelings of fullness, the research suggests that individuals only need to add an additional 10-15 grams of high-quality protein, such as eggs, beef, pork or dairy, at breakfast and lunch to achieve the recommended amount."

**\*Consume high-quality protein.**

Not all proteins are created equal. High-quality, or "complete," proteins found in animal-based foods such as beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products contain all the essential amino acids and are easily digestible. Most plant-based proteins found in vegetables and grains are considered lower quality, or "incomplete," proteins because they lack one or more [essential amino acids](#) and are less digestible.

Leidy's review of literature on [protein consumption](#) and satiety was published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* as part of a series of papers from the proceedings from Protein Summit 2.0. More than 60 nutrition researchers participated in the large-scale meeting geared toward advancing knowledge of [protein intake](#) and related health effects. Leidy was part of the Protein Summit 2.0 scientific steering committee, which also included Arne Astrup, University of Copenhagen; Donald Layman, University of Illinois; Richard Mattes, Purdue University; Douglas Paddon-Jones, University of Texas Medical Branch; Stuart Phillips, McMaster University; Nancy Rodriguez, University of Connecticut; and Robert Wolfe, University of Arkansas for Medical Science. Protein Summit 2.0 was hosted by the University of Missouri, Purdue University's Ingestive Behavior Research Center and the Reynolds Institute on Aging, and University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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