

Improving protein intake in older people living independently

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A new study from Bournemouth University has investigated how to

increase protein intake in older people living in the community. The study found that for the majority of people, a simple intervention such as adding sauce to a meal made a significant difference. Importantly, the effects were sustained in the following meal, too.

Low protein levels can lead to [health](#) complications, particularly in [older people](#), as it can speed up the loss of muscle mass, which can make them more vulnerable to falls, poor mobility and a loss of independence. However, managing and increasing protein intake is difficult in environments such as residential care homes or hospitals, but can be even more difficult for [people](#) living independently.

Lead researcher Professor Katherine Appleton explains, "Our previous research demonstrated the value of adding sauce to an older persons' meal, as it helped to increase the intake of protein-rich foods at that meal. However, for the health benefits to be worthwhile, high intakes of protein-rich foods need to be sustained for longer than a single meal.

"We know that it is possible for the benefits of the higher intakes to be reduced by a lower intake in the following meal, so our current study was designed to see if effects were maintained at the next meal, too."

Fifty-two participants completed the study, which saw people eating a lunch meal of chicken, potatoes and vegetables, either with sauce or with no sauce. This was followed by an evening meal with cold buffet and picnic-style food. Participants were allowed to eat as much or as little as they wished until comfortably full.

"For the majority of people, the addition of the sauce led to an increase in their protein intake at lunch," says Professor Appleton, "and this effect was maintained over the following meal, as well. Importantly, the increase in [protein intake](#) in this group was high enough following the meal with sauce that their health could be affected."

"We also found that for a significant minority, protein intakes were reduced as a result of adding sauce. We cannot yet explain the difference between the two groups," continues Professor Appleton, "but these differences show the importance of taking into account individual preferences and tastes."

"For health professionals and those working with or caring for older people in the community, this research suggests that simple interventions to increase [protein](#) intakes can be successful," says Professor Appleton, "This can help to improve people's health and reduce the need for treatment or hospital admissions. However, as with all care, it's important to personalise any intervention and take into account the individual's tastes and preferences."

More information: K.M. Appleton. Limited compensation at the following meal for protein and energy intake at a lunch meal in healthy free-living older adults, *Clinical Nutrition* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.clnu.2017.03.032](#)

Provided by Bournemouth University

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