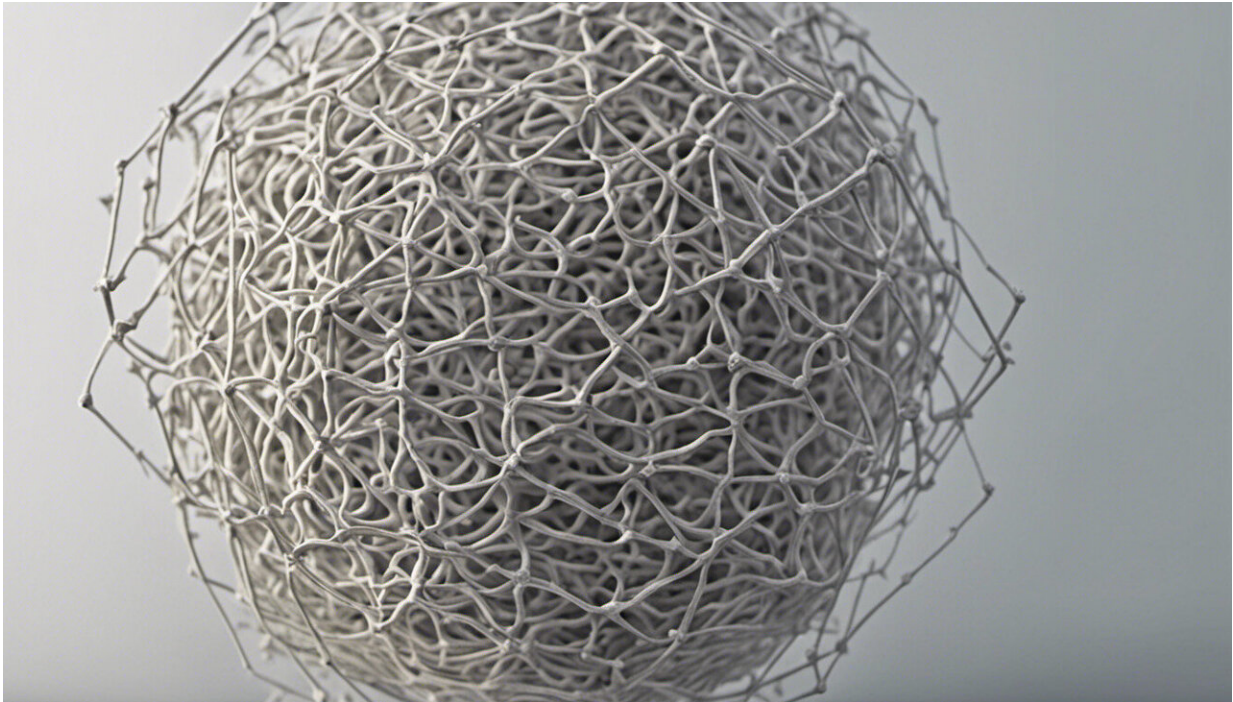


Five ways to increase protein intake as we age

October 7 2020, by Katherine Appleton and Emmy Van Den Heuvel



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Protein is an essential part of a healthy diet. It helps us build and maintain [strong muscles and bones](#), helps us better [recover from illness and injury](#), and reduces likelihood of [falls and fractures](#). But, as we age, many of us don't get enough protein in our diet. This is partly because our [appetites diminish naturally](#) as we get older. Convenience, effort, and value for money, are also reasons that older adults may [not get enough protein](#).

However, [protein](#) is extremely important as we age. This is because our bodies become less able to convert the protein we eat into muscle and other important biological factors that help us better recover from illness and injury—so we actually need to eat [more protein](#) as we get older.

Here are five tips to help you get enough protein in your diet as you age.

1. Add sauces and seasonings

Research shows that the [taste and flavor](#) of high-protein foods can encourage [older adults](#) to consume more of them. And taste and flavor are easily added with sauces and seasoning.

In studies where we have offered older adults a hot chicken meal either with or without [sauce](#) or [seasoning](#), we find more chicken was eaten from the meals with sauce or seasoning compared to plain meals. Meals with sauces and seasonings were also rated as more pleasant and tastier than the plain meals.

Adding sauces and seasonings to meals can increase the consumption of high-protein foods. Participants also subsequently ate equal amounts of protein at the next meal following flavored meals and plain meals, meaning that their [protein intake](#) was [increased overall](#).

2. Add cheese, nuts or seeds

Some foods that add flavors are naturally high in protein themselves. Good examples are strong cheeses—like blue cheese—as well as nuts and seeds.

As well as protein, [cheese](#) is full of calcium and other micronutrients, including Vitamins A, D and B12, which also help maintain strong

bones. Cheese can be easily added to soups, salads, pasta or mashed potatoes.

Nuts and seeds can be added to breakfast cereals, salads and desserts such as yogurts, and can provide an interesting texture as well as added flavor. Nuts and seeds are good sources of plant-based protein, and are also high in healthy fats, fiber, and many vitamins and minerals, and can reduce risk of many chronic conditions, such as [cardiovascular disease](#) and [type 2 diabetes](#). However, nuts and seeds may not be suitable for everyone (as they can be difficult to chew), but cheese is soft and full of flavor.

3. Eat eggs for breakfast

Breakfast meals tend to be [low in protein](#) – so eating eggs for breakfast is one way to boost protein intake.

Our recent study found egg intake [could be increased](#) by providing people with recipes and herb or spice seasoning packets that increased the taste and flavor of eggs. We gave participants recipes that used both familiar and exotic ingredients, from a variety of countries, for dishes that required a range of preparation methods. Egg intakes increased after 12 weeks by 20%, and were sustained for a further 12 weeks in those who had received the recipes.

Eggs are a [nutritious source of protein](#), and are typically [easy to prepare and chew](#), good value for money and have a long shelf life. Egg dishes can also add [taste and flavor](#) to the diet. However, [eggs](#) may not be suitable for everyone (including those with certain diagnosed conditions), but for most people [egg consumption is considered safe](#).

4. Make it easy

Try to make cooking as quick and easy as possible. Many types of fish are available that can be eaten directly from the pack, or simply need heating—such as smoked mackerel or tinned sardines. [Fish](#) is also full of many vitamins and minerals, as well as omega-3 [fatty acids](#) (which are present in oily fish like salmon) which is good for heart health. To allow easier and quicker cooking, purchase meat that is pre-cut, pre-prepared or pre-marinated, or fish that has been deboned and otherwise prepared, and then make use of your microwave. Fish can be very easily and quickly cooked in the microwave.

[Beans, pulses and legumes](#) are also easily bought in cans and ready-to-eat, and are all rich sources of protein for those who wish to consume a more plant-based diet. They also contain fiber and many vitamins and minerals, and can protect against many [chronic conditions](#) including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers.

5. Eat high-protein snacks

Many people reach for biscuits or a slice of cake at snack time, but try eating a [high-protein snack](#) instead next time. Many high-protein foods are already prepared and easy to consume. Some examples include yogurts or dairy-based desserts—such as crème caramel or panna cotta. [Yogurts and other dairy-based desserts](#) can offer many health benefits, including improved bone mineral density, as necessary for strong bones. Nuts, crackers with cheese, peanut butter, or hummus are also great choices.

Inadequate protein intake can result in [poor health outcomes](#), including low muscle mass and function and decreased bone density and mass, leading to increased risk of falls, frailty, and loss of mobility. To avoid these harms, researchers currently recommend consuming [1.0-1.2g protein per kilogram of bodyweight for older adults](#) compared to 0.8g of protein per kilogram of bodyweight for all adults.

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