

Dealing with Menopausal Symptoms? Eating Protein Could Help!

Decreasing estrogen levels may cause symptoms associated with menopause, but eating daily recommended amounts of protein may help combat some of them, such as:

- **Weight Gain**

Studies have shown that a diet high in protein, combined with regular exercise and strength training, play a role in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.^{1,2} This is through:

- **Building Muscle**

Muscle tissue burns more calories than fat tissue³ and more calories at rest;⁴ eating protein promotes that muscle building.⁵

- **Staying full**

Eating enough protein supports the feeling of being full and satiated, which can reduce both cravings and calorie intake.^{6,7}

- **Changes in Hair, Skin, and Nails**

Many women experience changes in their hair, skin, and nails, and eating a protein rich diet could help.⁸ This is because hair, skin, and nails are all made up in large part by proteins,⁹ and protein deficiencies have been linked to hair loss/thinning and nail brittleness.^{8,10,11} Further, collagen is the most abundant protein in the human body and is a major component of the skin.¹² As people get older the body's collagen production decreases, leading to wrinkles, sagging skin, and fine lines.¹³

- **Digestion Discomfort**

Decreases in estrogen levels may affect digestion, which could cause bloating, cramps, constipation, diarrhea, and gas.¹⁴ Making sure you have enough protein in your diet can aid in digestion, due to its role in the make-up of enzymes, a group of proteins that control biological reactions, including breaking down, absorbing, and digesting our food.¹⁵

- **Loss of Muscle Mass and Bone Density**

The loss of muscle mass, often accompanied by weak muscles, strength loss, and decreased mobility, can occur due to diminishing estrogen.^{16,17} Studies show that a diet high in protein, combined with regular exercise and strength training, can help maintain, build, and regenerate muscle mass.^{18,19} Loss of bone mass density can also occur due to decreasing estrogen,¹¹ and since protein is part of a bone's structure,²⁰ maintaining muscles is crucial to protecting them.²¹

Protein Tips

Not all protein sources are created equal, and the type of protein you choose is important. For example, eating too much red meat and processed meat (such as cured and smoked meats) may contribute to health problems,^{22,23} so aim to eat everything in moderation and check with your healthcare provider if you have concerns. Also read labels to make sure there is no added sodium or sugar in your protein sources.²⁴

Quality Protein Sources:^{25,26,27}

Animal Products

- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Fish
- Chicken breast
- Lean meats
- Turkey Breast

Plant-based

- Beans: chickpeas, kidney beans, black beans, pinto beans
- Soy Products (unprocessed and organic only): tofu, tempeh, edamame
- Nuts (including almonds, pistachios, cashews, and nut butter)
- Quinoa, Lentils, Seeds
- Protein powders (check the label; these can often be highly processed and high in sodium and sugar, which should be avoided)

Recommended Daily Protein Amount

While the minimum daily Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for adults in the U.S. for protein is 0.8grams per kg of body weight,⁵ those recommendations vary and increase based on factors such as age, weight, height, and activity level.⁵

Guidelines for women over 50:

The recommendation is 1-1.5 grams of protein per kilogram of weight (1 kilogram= 2.2 pounds) daily,²⁸ or 20-25 grams of high-quality protein per meal; following those guidelines, a 150lb woman would aim for 68-82 grams of protein per day.²⁹

This calculator is a good tool to help figure out how much protein is recommended for you: <https://www.calculator.net/protein-calculator.html>

What one serving size looks like:^{30,31}

- **Meat and poultry:** appx 25 grams, or 4 oz - the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand
- **Fish:** 3 oz, or the size of a checkbook
- **Eggs:** 2 medium sized
- **Beans:** ½ cup or the size of a computer mouse
- **Cheese:** 1 oz, about the size of 4 dice or the length of your index finger
- **Nuts:** 1 oz, or the size of a golf ball

The bottom line: Making sure you are getting enough quality protein during the day and being physically active has the potential to support your well-being throughout the menopausal years, and beyond.

The contents of this article are for informational purposes only and not intended to provide medical advice, treat, diagnose, or replace the advice of a licensed medical professional. Please consult with your healthcare provider before making any treatment, dietary, exercise, or lifestyle changes to ensure that these changes are appropriate for you.

Sources:

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