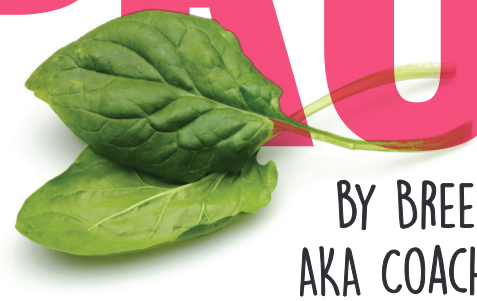
KEY NUTRIENTS IN PERIMENOPAUSE: PROTEIN



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Why protein is important for us in perimenopause:

1. **Protein** is needed for many jobs, including muscle repair and growth, hormone and enzyme function, brain function, mood support, and immune system support.
2. We don't **absorb** the amino acids in our protein foods as easily as before once we hit our **40's.** That means we need a little **more** than we used to in order to cover our bases.
3. If we don't have enough amino acids in our system from our last meal, our body **breaks down our muscle tissue** to get access to the ones stored there.
4. If we break down more muscle than we can rebuild, we **lose more each year,** contributing to weakness, lowered metabolism and greater potential for weight gain.
5. We want to **preserve** and hold onto muscle (in perimenopause more than ever) because the more muscle we have, the stronger our immune system, the higher our metabolic rate (so we burn fat more easily), and the **stronger and more capable** we are.
6. In perimenopause, lower hormone levels already make us more prone to **lose our muscle faster because:**

✓ **Lower estrogen:** we don't repair and recover as quickly after exercise as we used to

✓ **Lower progesterone:** we're more sensitive to cortisol (the stress hormone), so it's easier to lose muscle and gain body fat (not to mention feel more anxious and stressed)

✓ **Declining testosterone:** we don't have the same level of support for muscle and bone turnover and growth.

Bottom line: we need more protein than we used to if we want to give the body enough to go around for all the jobs it has, plus prevent muscle loss.

Protein amounts and ranges suggestions:

There are so many different ways to "calculate your protein" but I find it most helpful to have a **range** to aim for daily. I've included a few different ways to think about that range below, use whichever one feels good to you (and feel free to experiment).

Regardless of the exact amounts of carbs and fat, keeping protein intake balanced (in a slightly higher ratio than in years past) will help you preserve, repair and strengthen your muscle, which will maintain and increase your metabolism. AND, it will help you feel more full and satisfied in each meal you eat (making it harder to overeat carbs and fats).

- **Range 1 option:** 25-35% of your meals from protein. If your meals over the course of the day are made up of protein, carbs and fat, think of creating a meal with 25-35% protein first, then fill in the carbs and fat. Some ideas if you're active and looking to support muscle and lower body fat include 40-50% carbs, 20-25% fat. So one split could be 35% Protein, 45% Carbs, 20% Fat. Or 30% protein, 45% carbs, 25% fat. You can change the ratios, but keep your protein intake solid and include it with each meal you eat, including any "mini meals" aka snacks.

- **Range 2 option:** 30-40 grams of protein per meal, assuming you are having 3 main meals per day, with the option to add a protein shake as needed. Depending on your needs and activity level, this amount may be high or low for you, but even on the low end of this range, it ensures you've got 90-120 grams of protein to pull from daily. You could boost or even supplement your meals with protein powder as needed to hit your targets. If you were averaging 20-30 grams per meal in your cycling years, this is a good bump up for this stage of life.

- **Range 3:** More specific calculations of grams based on your lean mass and activity level.
    - Highly active: 1 gram per pound of lean mass.
    - Moderately active: 0.7-0.8 grams per pound of lean mass.

Lean mass is the weight of your body structural components minus your fat mass. Easiest to measure with a smart scale or bioimpedance type scan (DXA, inBody, BodPod, etc). You can also roughly calculate this using your body weight. Using an online calculator like this one may give you some good estimated amounts to work with.

Using a "body recomposition" goal with an online calculator helps ensure you will preserve muscle first and foremost, which is of the essence in our menopause years. Most online calculators are not set up for women in this life stage, and if you eat too little or get stuck in a "dieting" approach with too low caloric intake overall, you may create greater stress in your system which will cause more weight gain and faster muscle loss.

Common protein food sources:

- Eggs*, beef (various cuts*), bison, pork, wild game, chicken (skin on*), turkey, fish (cod, haddock, tuna, flounder, perch, halibut, salmon*) and shellfish (shrimp, crab, lobster, scallops, oysters)
- Dairy (milk products): Greek yogurt (full fat*), milk (full fat*), cheeses*, fermented dairy products like kefir (full fat*)
- Legumes**: Lupin, Lentils, Green Peas, Soybeans (tempeh/tofu), Red beans, Black beans, Yellow beans, Fava beans, Chickpeas
- Whole grains**: quinoa, buckwheat, amaranth, wheat, rice, corn, oats (ensure your grains are soaked, sprouted, or fermented to consume, and that you're looking for non-GMO plants)
- Seeds*: chia, sunflower, pumpkin, flax, sesame, hemp
- Nuts*: almonds, pistachios, walnuts, cashews, brazil nuts, peanuts
- Some Vegetables: i.e. avocado, broccoli, spinach, kale, sweet potatoes (these all contain some protein, but are not adequate protein sources on their own.)

It's easy to overeat without meaning to when you're aiming to up your protein. So just be aware that many of the foods above also contain fat or carbs, or a combination. For instance, eggs - a well-know protein source - contain an equal or higher amount of fat. Tempeh, made from soy, is a great source of plant protein that also contains an equal amount of carbs. Perimenopause is a great time to start checking your grams and getting a feel for the foods you want to have in your regular rotation so you know what you're getting.

**foods that contain a fair amount of fat as well as protein*
***foods that contain a fair amount carbs as well as protein*

In perimenopause, you can typically bump up your protein intake a bit by:

a) Mindfully including a solid protein source in **each meal** you eat.

b) Upping the protein amount in **any recipe** you're making slightly, while keeping the other ingredients the same. For instance, increase your protein amount from 4oz to 5-6oz. Or consider swapping an ingredient like sour cream for plain Greek yogurt, which is high in protein.

c) Use **protein powder or a protein supplement** and enjoy a protein shake or smoothie as a snack rather than a high fat/high carb snack alone. You can even make things like "nice cream" with a frozen banana and a serving of protein powder in the blender for a nice treat.

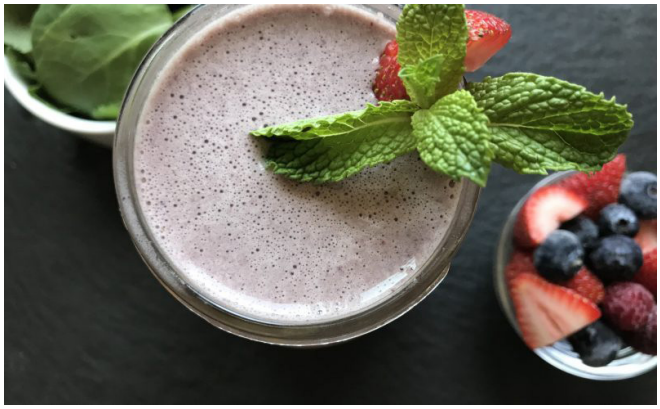
d) **Ideas for staying balanced:** for meals that feature eggs, an easy way to get the beneficial protein and other nutrients in whole eggs is to include 1-2 whole eggs (12 grams of protein) and then up the protein by adding egg whites rather than more whole eggs. Or, consider adding a side of another type of protein to your meal. When it comes to things like nuts and seeds, treat these more like a "fat" than a protein in your meal, and consume in moderation (like you would an oil). If your protein source is also high in carbohydrates, that might be convenient! Just be aware that you're not seeing that food as a "protein" alone, and balancing your plate knowing that it's got both carbs and protein (i.e. tempeh, tofu, beans, etc).

Bottom line, ensure protein is present in each meal you eat, and that you're having it in balance with your other nutrients (see range suggestions above). It's not the only nutrient, we don't want to overeat it, but we do need to ensure it's a featured part of every meal.

Supplements:

Protein powders: different sources of protein are used to create protein powders. Typically you want a protein powder with a "complete" source of protein (meaning it contains all the essential amino acids that your body cannot make on its own).

Different foods contain different amino acids. Typically animal based foods contain all the essentials, while most plants contain a variety of them (with some exceptions that contain them all, i.e. soy, pea, hemp). Here's my guide on how to choose a protein powder.



There are other amino-acid containing supplements too. Here's my guide to the difference between protein powder, essential amino acids, BCAA's, collagen and creatine.

In a nutshell:

- **Protein powder** is like a protein food, and depending on the source it will contain the full range of essential amino acids your body can't make on its own. You digest protein powder like you digest a food, your body breaks it down and extracts the amino acids from it. Here's my brand of organic protein powder.
- **Collagen** contains multiple amino acids but 3 in abundance that help support our hair, skin, nails, bones and joints. As we age, we don't produce as much naturally so a supplement can be helpful.
- **Essential Amino Acids:** contain all of the essential amino acids your body can't make on its own (this includes the BCAA's). Typically these are made in a "free form" so your body doesn't need to digest them and they can be absorbed right away (see my Rock and Restore, specially formulated with an optimized dose of leucine, the most muscle supporting of the BCAA's).
- **BCAA's** (branch chain amino acids) these 3 amino acids are used for tissue repair and growth. Also typically found in their free form so they can be absorbed right away.
- **Creatine:** made by the body from amino acids, this gives you more power output in your workouts, which can lead to better results overall. I use this one.

More on Protein for Women

- **Protein for Women (part 1) Podcast:** why women need more protein, and how the essential amino acids work; how the amount of protein we need changes over time, why you don't need a protein supplement (and when you might want to use one)

- **Protein for Women (part 2) Podcast:** the difference between protein powders, BCAA's, essential aminos, creatine and collagen, and how to use the different formulas to your benefit