

Half of diabetic Americans consuming less protein than recommended

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A new study conducted by The Ohio State University and Abbott showed that half of the adults surveyed living with diabetes did not consume the daily recommended intake of protein, which is associated with lower diet quality, increased carbohydrate intake, and greater physical limitations. The study highlights protein intake as an essential and often overlooked consideration in meeting the nutritional needs of

people living with diabetes and its importance in supporting strength and mobility.

"We've long studied the impact of sugar consumption in people living with diabetes, but new data shed light on the critical association between low [protein](#) intake and diabetes," said Christopher Taylor, Ph.D. R.D., lead researcher, and professor of Medical Dietetics at The Ohio State University School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. "Diabetes is associated with a risk for developing low muscle mass, which can lead to falls and other injuries. That's why protein consumption—and awareness of the need for it—is critical to maintaining muscle mass and preserving functional mobility, which can help people living with diabetes live stronger overall lives."

Published in the scientific journal of human nutrition, *Nutrients*, the retrospective cross-sectional analysis examined data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) collected between 2005 and 2016 from more than 23,000 adults in the U.S. Key findings from the analysis include:

- People living with diabetes who did not consume the daily recommendation of protein on the day of intake reported a higher prevalence of physical limitations, including difficulty completing basic movements, such as stooping, crouching, kneeling, standing for long periods, and pushing or pulling large objects.
- Adults with diabetes who met protein recommendations had better overall diet quality, more closely meeting dietary recommendations for total daily intake of vegetables, whole grains, dairy and added sugars.
- People with diabetes who exhibited low protein intake showed significantly poorer nutrient density, lower overall diet quality, and consumed 12.5% more carbohydrates, which may negatively

impact glucose levels.

"This study highlights the importance of the quality of foods in our diet as well as the quantity of nutrients we need daily—both of which have a significant impact on health and mobility, especially for people living with diabetes," said Sara Thomas, Ph.D., R.D.N., a research scientist, and dietitian at Abbott specializing in diabetes. "Nutrition education will help people successfully manage a condition like diabetes, emphasizing the need to achieve a well-rounded diet with the right nutrients and avoid foods that are detrimental to optimal health."

Understanding the recommended daily intake requirements for macronutrients like protein, fat and carbohydrates, and more than 25 vitamins and minerals can be complicated. The National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine, developed the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), a set of reference values used to plan and assess nutrient intakes and provide recommended consumption levels. The DRIs recommend adults consume 0.36 grams of protein per pound of body mass each day, which means that a person weighing 150 pounds should consume 54 grams of protein per day. The DRI calculator can help determine individual nutrient needs for overall micro-and macronutrient intakes. Individuals should discuss results with a healthcare professional.

"This new research underscores Abbott's long-time focus on diabetes care and will help us continue to support people living with this condition," said Matt Beebe, divisional vice president and general manager of Abbott's U.S. nutrition business. "At Abbott, we are continually working to advance our understanding so that we can enable a more holistic approach to managing [diabetes](#) from the point of diagnosis with industry-leading glucose monitoring and world-class nutrition."

More information: Stephanie M. Fanelli et al, Low Protein Intakes and Poor Diet Quality Associate with Functional Limitations in US Adults with Diabetes: A 2005–2016 NHANES Analysis, *Nutrients* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/nu13082582](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13082582)

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