



POWER UP:

The continual rise of protein

Protein is rising to powerhouse status among nutritional ingredients. It enjoys an unheard-of cachet among consumers that has been building for more than a decade.

New Nutrition Business (NNB) has once again named protein as one of the top trends in its report “10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2017.” But its continuing popularity almost defies explanation. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that the average American may be eating more than twice as much protein as recommended in dietary guidance.¹ Even so, consumers still seem to want more. Can the trend continue to grow?

Most likely. The desire to add protein to the diet is becoming a global phenomenon. Its popularity is growing faster than consumer awareness of how much protein they need beyond supporting basic growth and development, and its appeal is expanding beyond the traditional consumer market for muscle health and sports nutrition, according to research firm Euromonitor.² While U.S. consumers are at the forefront of the trend, it is also gaining ground in countries all around the world, with promising new growth in markets like Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.³

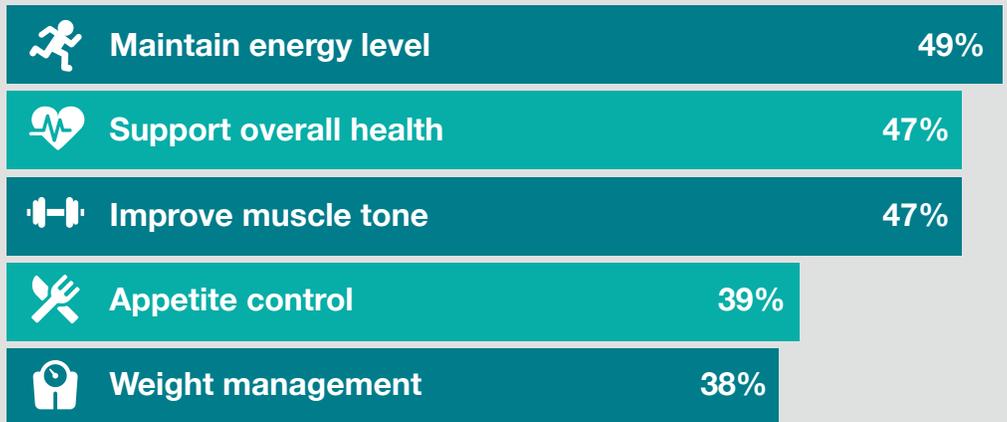
So what’s protein got that other ingredients lack? For one thing, consumers have strong beliefs about protein and what it does in their bodies. According to Julian Mellentin, editor of *NNB* and author of the report, consumer belief about protein encompasses a broad range of ideas from an overall health halo to very specific ideas, such as helping with weight loss and the health of skin and teeth.⁴

The emerging protein consumer

But the space is evolving. Protein’s rise has long benefitted from the high-profile nature of high-protein diets (such as the Zone and Paleo Diets), and perceived benefits about muscle and bone maintenance. But now, consumers are also understanding that protein contributes to feelings of satiety, can support healthy blood sugar maintenance and help with weight maintenance.⁵ That said, they most often look to protein for that much needed modern lifestyle benefit — energy.

continued

Benefits of including protein in the diet*



* Source: Consumer Protein Perceptions and Needs, Sue Fennelly, Senior Account Executive, NPD Group, 2014.

In a 2014 report, the NPD Group classified protein consumers into three basic groups: traditional protein purists (18%), flexible protein users (14%) and the knowledgeable but indifferent (20%).⁶ (Another 48% of consumers say they are less concerned about protein — they might still buy and eat protein products, they just don't often think about them.)

Traditional Protein Purists*

- 18% (31 million U.S. consumers)
- Average age 50.7
- Least likely to have kids in the household
- 74% eat protein daily
- View meat as the best source of protein and are not aware or interested in new/different sources

Flexible Protein Users*

- 14% (24 million U.S. consumers)
- Average age 48.2 (but overall younger than purists)
- Higher level of education
- Often vigilant researchers when grocery shopping
- Less likely to consider meat the best source of protein

* Source: Consumer Protein Perceptions and Needs, Sue Fennelly, Senior Account Executive. NPD Group, 2014.

Plant proteins rise to the occasion

While meat and cheese continue to be the leading protein-based products, many consumers are seeking alternatives. This has helped propel the growth of plant-based protein ingredients, made from a range of high-protein foods such as beans, peas, lentils and soy. These protein ingredients can be more cost effective in certain applications, and they have an appeal for younger consumers concerned about the high environmental costs of animal proteins and potential digestive issues from too much dairy and meat.³ Even classic protein users, such as athletes and active consumers, are now turning to products with vegetarian protein to get their daily allotment.

Plant-based proteins can present some taste and formulation issues, but overall they represent good options for a variety of product applications. Bakery products are a key category, as bakers address growing consumer concern about carbohydrate intake.⁷ An extra boost of protein in baked goods or snacks can contribute to the appeal of these items while displacing sugars.

There are a variety of ingredients to choose from. Pea protein is one of the newer kids on the block, and has shown growing versatility in various applications, and even ingredients like high-protein flax and chia seeds are seeing emerging acceptance in various applications. But soy-based proteins have long been the mainstay plant protein ingredient in foods and beverage products, and with good reason.

continued

Consumer attitudes toward soy are positive and fit in well with their demand for healthier foods. Soy ingredients come in a variety of forms, from flour to flakes, and textured proteins. They can be blended to meet a variety of application-specific protein requirements, while also meeting expectations for flavor, texture, mouthfeel and shelf life.

Soy-based proteins also have a strong scientific story. They have well-researched benefits such as helping maintain healthy cholesterol levels,⁸ as well as emerging scientific evidence for their effects on satiety and weight loss, including a 2014 study noting that soy-based diets are as effective as meat in appetite control⁹ and a more recent study showing their efficacy in satiety for young people.¹⁰

Soy-based ingredients also provide a cost-effective option in many applications. Meat analogs, where processors are faced with volatile ingredient costs, are a good example. Textured soy flours and vegetable proteins can provide immediate savings as well as better function than many protein sources.

As suppliers continue to step up to the plate with great plant-based protein ingredients, the sky may be the limit for the continued growth of added protein in functional products.

Sources

¹ National Center for Health Statistics, Fact Sheet. March 2017. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/factsheets/factsheet_nutrition.pdf

² *Global Trends in Protein*. March 2016. <http://www.euromonitor.com/global-trends-in-protein/report>

³ Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2017. *New Nutrition Business*. <https://www.new-nutrition.com/keytrend?id=6>
Current Concepts and Unresolved Questions in Dietary Protein Requirements and Supplements in Adults. Phillips SM. *Front Nutr*. 2017 May 8;4:13. doi: 10.3389/fnut.2017.00013. eCollection 2017. **Review**. PMID: 28534027 [Free PMC Article](#)

⁴ Protein "requirements" beyond the RDA: implications for optimizing health. Phillips SM, Chevalier S, Leidy HJ. *Appl Physiol Nutr Metab*. 2016 May;41(5):565-72. doi: 10.1139/apnm-2015-0550. Epub 2016 Feb 9. **Review**. PMID: 26960445 [Free Article](#)

⁵ *Weight loss maintenance: A review on dietary related strategies*. Soeliman FA, Azadbakht L. *J Res Med Sci*. 2014 Mar;19(3):268-75. **Review**. PMID: 24949037 [Free PMC Article](#)
Impact of Diet Composition on Blood Glucose Regulation. Russell WR, Baka A, Björck I, Delzenne N, Gao D, Griffiths HR, Hadjilucas E, Juvonen K, Lahtinen S, Lansink M, Loon LV, Mykkänen H, Östman E, Riccardi G, Vinoy S, Weickert MO. *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr*. 2016;56(4):541-90. doi: 10.1080/10408398.2013.792772. **Review**

⁶ Consumer Protein Perceptions and Needs, Sue Fennelly, Senior Account Executive. NPD Group, 2014.

⁷ The Power of Protein. May 2015. *Food Business News*. http://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/news_home/Supplier-Innovations/2015/05/The_power_of_protein.aspx?ID={D-5D6ED78-6A70-43C5-8EF7-3308572D233E}&page=4

⁸ Ramdath, DD, et al. Beyond the cholesterol lowering effect of soy protein: A review of the effects of dietary soy and its constituents on risk factors for cardio vascular disease. *Nutrients* 2017. Apr;9(4): 324. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5409663/>

⁹ Neacsu M, et al. Appetite control of satiety with vegetarian (soy) and meat-based high protein diets for weight loss in obese men; A randomized crossover trial. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2014. Aug;100(2): 548-558. <http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/100/2/548.long>

¹⁰ Leidy, HJ et al. Consuming high protein snacks affects appetite control, satiety and diet quality in young people and influences select aspects of mood and cognition. *J. Nutr*. 2015. Jul; 145(7):1614-22. <http://jn.nutrition.org/content/145/7/1614.long>