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Protein, weight loss and maintenance

With rising rates of obesity, it is critical to understand the factors that affect weight loss and weight maintenance. The role of dietary protein, which has been the subject of much attention in the last few years, is reviewed in a recent issue of the Annual Review of Nutrition. This comprehensive review examines how protein influences body weight regulation via its effects on satiety, thermogenesis, energy efficiency and body composition based on current evidence.

Protein is more satiating and promotes less energy intake than carbohydrate or fat. Protein also has a higher thermogenic effect (diet-induced energy expenditure) than carbohydrate or fat. In addition, protein has favourable effects on body composition during weight loss or maintenance. Higher protein diets help preserve fat free mass, reduce fat mass and improve metabolic profile. These effects, all in part related to each other, may contribute to the prevention of obesity.

The review notes there is little evidence that high protein diets pose a risk to kidney function in healthy individuals. Research also indicates that relatively high protein intakes increase bone mineral mass and lowers the incidence of osteoporotic fracture. Furthermore, nitrogen intake has a positive effect on calcium balance and preserves bone mineral content during weight loss.

FOR YOUR PRACTICE:

It is important to consider protein intake in helping your clients with weight management goals. Absolute protein intake (in grams) appears to be more important than the proportion of protein in the diet (expressed as a percentage of total energy intake) for weight loss or maintenance. When energy intake is reduced, protein intake should be sustained by keeping the grams of protein consumed at the same level, so that expressed in grams/day the protein content remains normal. Maintaining protein intakes, while reducing energy from other sources, can be advantageous in terms of satiety, thermogenesis, energy efficiency and body composition for promoting healthy weights.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Read the abstract, [*Dietary Protein, Weight Loss, and Weight Maintenance*](#), by Westerterp-Plantenga M.S. et al. Annu. Rev. Nutr. 2009:11.1-11.21 (Epub

ahead of print).

[Listen](#) to Dr. Stuart Phillips discuss the link between protein and satiety in his recent podcast.

See our [Nutrition Perspective](#) newsletters for health professionals: *The Satiating Power of Protein* (May 2008) and *Protein – Can Higher Intakes Benefit Health?* (August 2005). Each includes a 2-page client fact sheet.

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