

Do You Really Need That Post-Workout Protein Shake?

We've all seen powders and shakes in grocery and health food stores promising to improve recovery, accelerate fat loss, and more. Is there a truth behind all this hype?

Are post-workout [protein shakes](#) better than whole foods? The answer is, it depends. You don't need to buy protein supplements if you follow a healthy, balanced diet with the right amount of calories, [carbohydrates](#), proteins, and fats to support your health and fitness goals. However, if convenience and speed are important to you, reaching for a supplement can help get the job done too. Here are a few main things to consider in your decision to help you maximize your exercise nutrition.

What should you focus on after exercise?

Regardless of your fitness goals, your post-workout meal or shake should provide protein and carbohydrates to support muscle repair and [recovery](#), growth, and replenish your energy stores. Proteins contain a variety of [amino acids](#) in varying amounts that serve as building blocks for muscle repair, and carbohydrates enhance muscle recovery and replenish glycogen stores in your muscles and liver. As a general target after exercise, you should aim for 1.0-1.2 grams of carbohydrate per kilogram body weight, and 0.25-0.3 grams of protein per kilogram body weight. A meal or snack within 3-4 hours of exercise is a simple time frame to remember. Depending on your preference, both whole food sources and supplements can be used to obtain these necessary nutrients.

Comparing whole foods and supplements

Most supplements specifically formulated for "post-workout" will provide both [protein and carbohydrates](#) to aid recovery. But before you reach for that supplement, you may want to consider a few other factors. Supplements carry the risk of contamination due to manufacturing processes, so they require you to do a bit of homework to make sure you're getting your money's worth. And if you're using a plant-based protein, it's just as likely to be contaminated. So plant-based protein powders need to be just as carefully evaluated as whey. Work with a dietitian to find a safe and effective brand. Some whole food protein sources can be better absorbed and utilized by our bodies when compared to proteins consumed in [supplement form](#) depending on the kind of protein powder. Furthermore, many plant-based whole-food carbohydrate sources also contain phytochemicals which are associated with many health benefits, as well as potassium and magnesium to help keep your electrolytes in check. Based on these facts, whole-foods may actually be your better choice after those challenging workouts!

What are post-exercise meal examples?

For your post-workout meal, the amount of food you consume will depend on your caloric needs and [exercise goals](#). Here are a few simple whole food post workout ideas.

If you're working out first thing in the morning, a few post-workout breakfast ideas include:

- [Tofu scramble](#) with herbs, salsa, and a corn tortilla
- Egg-whites or 1 egg with 1 egg white, whole wheat toast, and a slice of low-fat cheddar cheese
- Fruit smoothie with 6 oz. nonfat Greek yogurt – frozen bananas and berries are tasty choices to add to almost any smoothie combination
- Oatmeal made with nonfat or low-fat milk of your choice, banana, ground flax seeds, and peanut butter
- Fresh fruit with low-fat cottage cheese

If you typically work out after work, here are simple post-workout meals you can enjoy for dinner:

- Tofu veggie stir fry with brown rice
- Shrimp pasta primavera with whole wheat or bean penne
- [Lentil veggie soup](#) with whole grain bread
- Chicken tacos with corn tortillas and veggies

If you prefer to use a mix of your favorite foods instead, here's the formula for putting together your post-workout meal:

- Choose a low-fat or fat-free protein source (e.g., tofu, beans, egg whites, low-fat dairy, chicken/turkey breast, lean meat, OR a high-quality protein powder)
- Add some carbohydrates (e.g., brown rice cakes, [potatoes](#), oatmeal, fruit, whole grain bread, brown rice, quinoa, [amaranth](#), veggies)
- Add some healthy fats (e.g., [walnuts](#), chia seeds, olive oil, avocado)

Whether you're training for competition (marathon, race, Ironman, triathlon, etc.), or just trying to stay active and healthy, providing your body with the right nutrients after your workout will help you achieve your health and fitness goals!

For even more specific targets for protein and carbohydrate based on your exercise routine and fitness goals, check out [The Plant-Based Boost, Nutrition Solutions for Athletes and Exercise Enthusiasts](#).