

Health and Fitness

Making And Maintaining Muscle

(NAPSA)—The good news is if you're like most Americans, you don't need to worry about eating enough protein.

High-protein diets, protein powders, supplements and shakes may be popular but there's no solid evidence that most Americans need more protein. Most of us already eat all we need, and then some.

Proteins are actually chains of small molecules called amino acids. Your body can make some but not all of these building blocks. The ones you can't make are called essential amino acids.

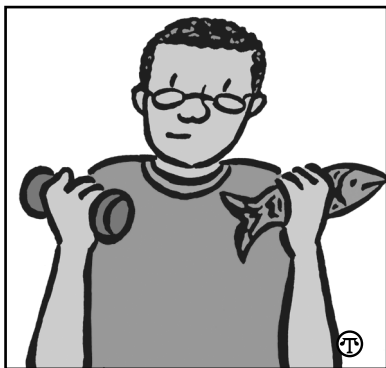
Fortunately, says Dr. Van S. Hubbard, director of the Division of Nutrition Research Coordination at the National Institutes of Health, "since protein is such a common component of most foods that you eat, if you're eating a relatively varied diet, you're getting enough protein."

Can high-protein diets help you lose weight? "High-protein diets often are associated with a greater sensation of fullness," Dr. Hubbard says. Long-term studies of these diets have found that most differences in weight loss can be explained by a decrease in calories rather than the protein intake itself.

What about protein powders and shakes? The ads say they have essential amino acids that the body can't make.

"That is true," Hubbard says, "but if you're eating a varied diet, particularly animal protein, there is skimpy, if any, data that it's better to eat protein in supplement form than in food."

Some people, such as vegetarians, do have to pay attention to the protein in their diets. While animal proteins have all the



Proteins, found in fish, meat and certain vegetables, are the major component of muscle. They also perform other crucial activities in every cell of your body.

essential amino acids, plant-based proteins can have low amounts of them. Vegetarians who don't eat eggs or dairy products need to eat protein from a variety of sources to get all the different amino acids they need. Examples include rice with beans or peanut butter and bread.

Some older adults don't eat enough protein to keep their muscles strong. Maintaining muscle is particularly important as you age. Older adults who lose muscle are more likely to fall and have injuries like broken hips. They might also have trouble doing basic things like getting up from a chair, walking up stairs or taking a stroll through the park.

See your doctor if you've had recent weight loss, muscle fatigue or a drop in muscle strength. These may be signs you're not eating enough protein but could be symptoms of other problems.

—Adapted from *NIH News in Health*, a publication of the National Institutes of Health available at newsinhealth.nih.gov.