

Protein Powder: 7 Tips to Find the Best One

1. Make sure it's digestible.

Almost all protein powders are easily digested, but when compared to each other, results vary. Currently, there is no single study that compares the digestibility of soy, hemp, rice, whey, casein, and pea protein powders using the same testing methods. Digestibility is important because it affects our body's ability to build muscle. Our bodies need protein to build muscle.

One study found hemp protein to be about 87% digestible, but according to the Protein Digestibility-Corrected Amino Acid Scores (PDCAAS), it has about a 48% digestibility. The PDCAAS also rates soy protein isolate as 92% digestible and casein protein as 100% digestible. Current digestibility studies on pea and rice protein lack comparisons to other protein sources. However, the research clearly stated high digestibility on account of both proteins, but results are weakened when not compared to another protein.

Digestibility can also be rated in terms of how fast it's digested. Whey has a rapid digestion rate, making it a digestibility winner. One research study found whey to be more digestible than soy, and soy was found to be more digestible than casein.

2. Look for one with a complete amino acid profile.

A protein powder's amino acid profile determines whether or not it's a complete protein source (amino acids all globbed together are what make a protein). A complete protein has all the essential amino acids. Essential amino acids are the ones that the body can't synthesize on its own, making them a dietary requirement. Pea protein powder is the only protein powder to not contain all of the essential amino acids (unless the manufacturer adds them in). Although many of the other protein powders are complete proteins, amino acid profiles still vary between sources. For example, hemp protein is higher in arginine than casein, pea, and soy proteins. Following consumption, whey protein showed the highest level of essential amino acids in the blood compared to soy or casein proteins.

3. Investigate how it's made.

Choose a protein powder that came from an organic protein source and inspect how the protein was grown (whether from a cow or a plant). You also need to know how the protein is isolated from its mother source. Some protein powders, especially non-organic ones, are made using solvents (very toxic chemicals) to separate out the protein. Solvent residues are always left in the product. Make sure the manufacturing process is solvent free.

4. Beware of heavy metal contamination.

Rice protein seems to have a predisposition to lead contamination, especially since a lot of rice protein powders come from China. A major source of the world's lead and cadmium exposure comes from rice. In May 2010, Consumer Lab found NutriBiotic's vanilla flavored rice protein to contain 6 mcg of lead per 15 gram scoop. They also found Metagenics UltraMeal chocolate flavored rice protein to contain 5.9 mcg of lead for a daily serving of 104 grams. In July 2010, *Consumer Reports* found two Muscle Milk products each contaminated with about 12-13 mcg of lead for 3 servings.

5. Eat as local as possible.

Different countries have different standards. Stick to protein sources that have come from the U.S. or Canada, or investigate a local source if you live overseas. Biotics found high levels of lead in rice protein powder imported from China.

6. Find a quality company.

Protein powders are **not regulated** by any governmental agency, including the FDA. Find a company that follows the proposed FDA current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP) for nutritional supplements. If you don't know how to find this out, call them and ask. A quality company will also conduct third party testing of all their materials. By finding a good company, you eliminate HUNDREDS of protein powders. It costs money to have better manufacturing practices and third party testing, so the more expensive protein powders are usually the better ones.

7. Watch out for fillers.

Some companies cut their protein powder with sugar, and indicate it on their label. Other companies aren't as honest. Due to lack of quality regulations, sneaky companies add fillers to their protein powders and never say so on the label.