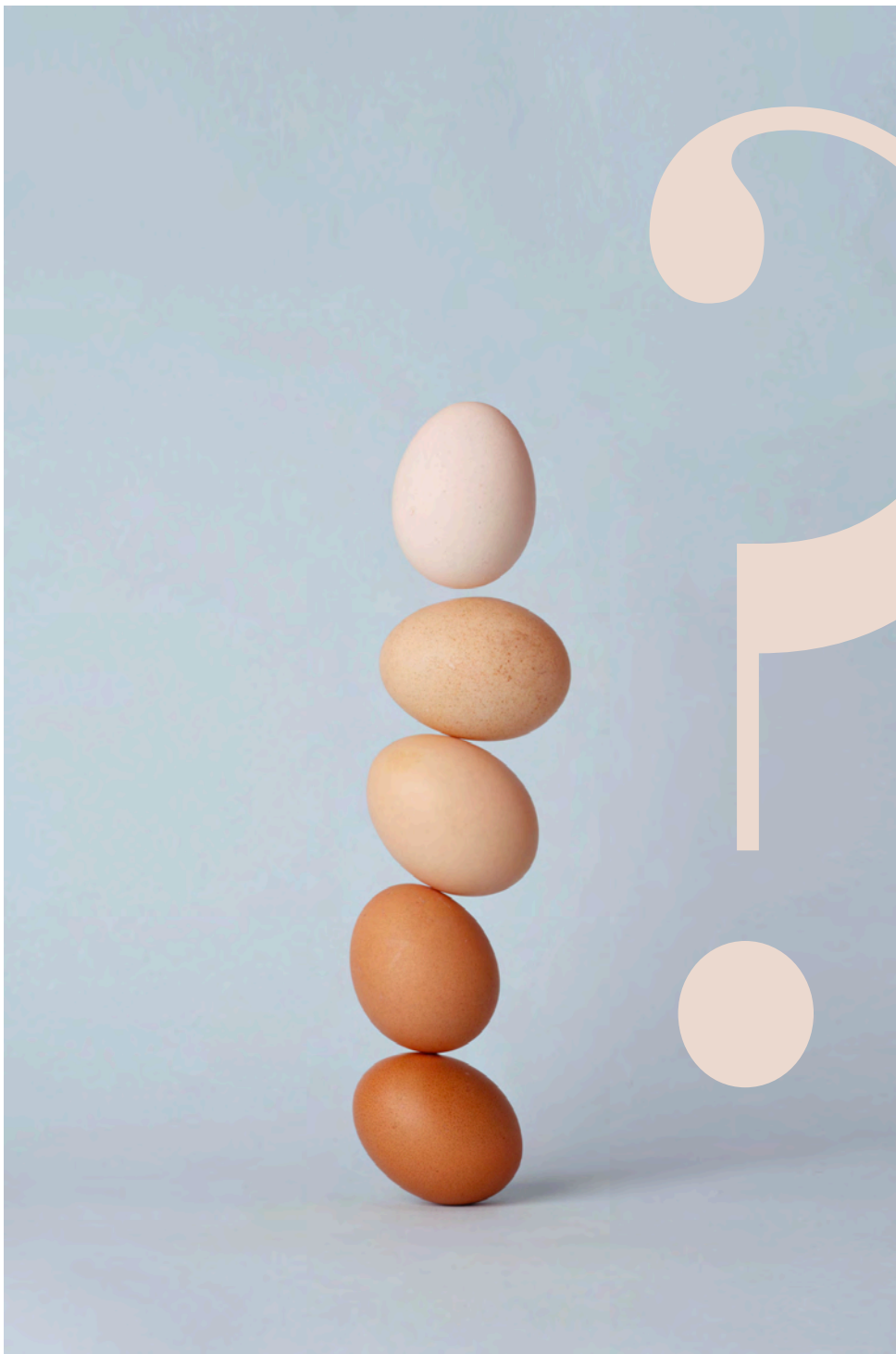


# “Hey Siri... How much protein in an egg?”

By Sandie Fredriksson

Sandie Fredriksson teaches busy women how to lose weight in a way that feels freeing and sustainable. She also takes an empowering approach to ageing well, with her 8 week plan ‘Healthy Habits for Life’.



Whether from animal sources, plants or powders, we all include protein in our diets, but are we getting enough? Sandie explains the role of this essential macronutrient, how much to target and why the older we get, the more it matters.

I want you to know how much protein you're getting because the truth is, most women don't get enough of it. Even those that are focussed on making healthy choices are often falling worryingly short - and actually, previous to my career as a health coach, I was one of them.

I'd start my day with avocado on toast and pat myself on the back for my low-calorie lunchtime veggie soup or salad. Much like many of my clients (and perhaps you), it wasn't until the evening chicken breast, salmon or steak that protein finally took its turn in the spotlight.

But then I trained as a nutritional chef and realised how little attention I'd been giving to this vital part of my diet. It was a light bulb moment when in one of my very first classes, the lecturer called protein the 'hero' ingredient on a plate. "The word protein is derived from proteios; the Greek word meaning of primary place," she said. "The clue's in the name!"

### “What's all the fuss about protein?”

Here's the science-y bit (I'll keep it short!). Proteins are composed of chains of amino acids, which play a part in just about every process in your body, from repairing damaged cells to manufacturing all our wonderful hormones, like estrogen, insulin and thyroid. Your body is incredibly smart and can naturally produce eleven of the twenty amino acids it needs to function.

So, what about the other nine? Well, your body relies on you consuming those in your diet, and it needs you to do that every single day. For the most part, the human body has no specialised cells to store protein efficiently, as it does for fat and carbohydrate. That's what makes the 'every day' part so important.

Ridges in your nails, flaky skin and hair loss can all be visible signs your body may not be getting all the protein it needs. But what about the symptoms we can't see? Neglecting this key macronutrient also means neglecting your immune system, which relies on the protein you eat to function properly. The past year has reminded all of us that as we age our defence system ages with us - but it's not just about fighting a new coronavirus.

### TOP TIP:

If you find that woolly sock season brings with it a relentless carousel of runny nose, chesty cough, sore throat and fever, try upping the amount of protein in your diet. Many of my clients have found this simple change made a big difference to their winter resilience.



## *“How do I know if I am getting enough?”*

Most health experts recommend a minimum of one gram per kilogram of your healthy body weight per day, and if you are very active (especially weight training), you can bump that up to 1.5 to 2 grams. For example, I weigh 58 kilograms and target 90 grams of protein a day.

However, as I am now in the habit of skipping breakfast, getting it all in does require some deliberate planning. Organic eggs, Greek yoghurt, wild-caught fish and grass-fed lean meats are my daily go-to sources, plus I also grab an extra 20 grams of protein with a protein powder most days. No longer reserved for the likes of athletes and bodybuilders, these supplements have gained mainstream popularity – and for good reason. More on that later.

A side note for the vegans and vegetarians amongst you. Animal proteins are ‘complete proteins’ meaning they contain all nine essential amino acids, yet many plant-based proteins are ‘incomplete’, having most but not all nine. If you are following a plant-based diet look to combine your plant proteins to get the full complement of nine essential amino acids.

## TOP TIP:

If tracking your protein sounds like a tedious chore, try using Siri as your digital assistant:

“Hey Siri, how much protein in 100 grams of chicken?”  
“There are about 26g of protein in 100g of chicken.”

My client’s love this time-saving hack, and yes, it works for chickpeas and lentils too.

## *“Why is protein so important as we get older?”*

As you move into your fifties, fracture-proofing your body becomes a priority, but you may be surprised to learn that your bones start deteriorating long before that. Studies point to a positive effect of high protein intake on bone mineral density (alongside other key nutrients and regular resistance training). One of the most frustrating things about bone loss is that you cannot really reverse it. But fortunately, there’s a lot you can do today to hold on to what you already have, and starting in your forties is not too soon!

One natural ageing process you can easily reverse is muscle-loss, but you need to eat sufficient protein to do it. I appreciate that asking for help getting up out of your chair after dinner might feel a long way off, but try not to make this an ‘I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it’ situation. The medical term for muscle-loss is sarcopenia, which appropriately, albeit rather horrifyingly, comes from the Greek meaning ‘vanishing flesh’. Is it just me, or are these Greek origin stories proving to be remarkably motivating?

For further motivation, check out 74-year old fitness influencer Joan MacDonald’s Instagram @trainwithjoan. If you love a before and after photo (I do!) you’ll love hers. Joan has captured the attention of over a million followers while documenting her four-year health and fitness journey and four-stone weight loss, proving it’s never too late to get stronger and leaner. Whilst I’m not suggesting you match Joan’s 150 grams of protein a day (she weighs around 60 kilos), I am urging you to incorporate strength training in your age-well plan and consume enough protein to fuel your efforts.

Just to chuck a little more metaphoric fuel on our ageing fires: the older we get, the harder it is for our bodies to make use of the protein we do eat. Something your PT will cleverly refer to as ‘anabolic resistance’. Simply put, you just don’t make muscle like you used to. That’s why it takes your teenager a fraction of the effort it takes you to get leaner and stronger. It’s also why the older you are, the more dietary protein you need.

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## “Will protein help me lose weight?”

It's no secret that your metabolism starts slowing down in your forties. As the muscle moves out, the fat moves in! Every week I speak to women who tell me they've tried diet upon diet, losing weight only to pile it back on again.

It's a soul-destroying cycle, and one of the first steps I take to free them from it is to increase how much protein they eat. That's right, I ask them to eat more, not less. For some reason people think dieting means eating as little as possible when what it really means is eating the right types of foods, especially protein. This helps to protect their muscle mass and metabolism; the more muscle you have, the more calories you burn at rest. It also keeps them feeling full for longer because your body digests protein slowly. Of all the foods we eat, protein burns the most calories in the process of your body breaking it down.

While it's normal for our energy levels to fluctuate a little throughout the day, including protein at breakfast and lunch will help you avoid those mid-morning and 3pm energy slumps. You know, the ones that send you off on a frenzied hunt for something sugary and before you know it, you've blown through 200 calories on shortbread biscuits.

### TOP TIP:

For my clients who struggle when we reduce the size of their dinner plate, I recommend chewing slowly on a few bites of the protein element in their meal first. This helps them feel fuller sooner, and stops them from needing to go back for more.

## “So, what about protein powders?”

Over the past five years, these powders have transitioned from the gym to the kitchen and become a convenient, no-fuss way for women to top up their protein and meet their goal. Most standard servings of protein powder provide around 20g of protein for less than 100 calories, which is why I often include them as a valuable weight loss tool. But not all protein powders are created equal and what you don't want to see on the label are things like sweeteners, chemicals and additives.

If you are happy with a dairy-based powder, I recommend choosing an organic whey protein sourced from grass-fed cows (whey is a by-product of the cheese making process). However, my favourite, and the most popular with my clients, is Nuzest's Vanilla Clean Lean Protein - a pea protein formula with a complete amino acid profile. Just add nut milk or water, or both.

### TOP TIP:

Throw in a teaspoon of peanut butter, two walnuts and a square of dark chocolate for a delicious but healthy (and wonderfully protein-packed!) snickers-inspired shake.

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