

THE PROTEIN POWDER GUIDE

What to buy. What to avoid.
And exactly why it matters for your body.

FOR: PRE-OP PATIENTS | EARLY POST-OP | ACTIVE PATIENTS

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SECTION 1 — THE BASICS

WHY PROTEIN POWDER MATTERS

Whether you're heading into surgery, a few weeks out, or an active person trying to build muscle without wrecking your gut — protein powder is a tool. Not a meal. Not a magic fix. A tool. And like any tool, it only works when you pick the right one.

Not all protein powders are built the same. The source matters. The processing matters. The sweetener matters. What's in the ingredient list beyond the protein matters. This guide breaks all of that down so you can shop smart.

SECTION 2 — POWDER VS. READY-TO-DRINK

CHOOSE POWDER. EVERY TIME.

Pre-made shakes look convenient. They are. But convenience comes with a cost — you lose control over what goes into your body.

AVOID READY-TO-DRINK SHAKES BECAUSE:

- Preservatives and fillers required for long shelf life
- Additives like carrageenan, maltodextrin, and artificial emulsifiers are common
- Sweetener choices locked in — most use sucralose or acesulfame potassium
- You can't control the ingredient list the way you can with powder
- Hidden carbs, sugars, and fat disguised behind misleading labels

With a powder, you control the liquid, the mix-ins, the portion, and the full ingredient list. That control matters — especially post-op when your gut is sensitive and needs clean inputs.

SECTION 3 — PROTEIN TYPES EXPLAINED

HOW PROTEIN POWDER IS MADE — AND WHY IT CHANGES EVERYTHING

All whey starts the same: liquid byproduct of cheese-making. Manufacturers separate the curds and are left with liquid whey. That's pasteurized, dried, and processed. How much it gets processed is exactly what separates isolate from concentrate.

	Whey ISOLATE ✓	Whey CONCENTRATE
Protein per 100 cal	~23g	~18g
Protein purity	90%+	70–80%
Lactose content	<1g per serving	3.5–6g per serving
Fat content	Minimal / 0g	1–2g
Carbohydrates	~1g	~3.5g
Absorption speed	Fast	Slower
Lactose sensitivity safe?	YES	Often No
Price	Higher	Lower

Whey concentrate isn't a bad product — it's just not the right one. Extra lactose and fat cause bloating, cramping, and GI distress post-op. The extra processing in isolate removes the stuff that slows you down.

WHY WE RECOMMEND WHEY ISOLATE:

- ✓Higher protein per scoop — more protein, fewer calories
- ✓Lower lactose = less bloating, gas, and cramping post-op
- ✓Faster absorption — ideal post-workout and post-op recovery
- ✓Cleaner macro profile — no unnecessary fat or carbs
- ✓Better tolerated by sensitive digestive systems

SECTION 4 — EGG WHITE PROTEIN

DON'T SLEEP ON EGG WHITE PROTEIN

Before whey dominated the supplement world, eggs were the gold standard — and for good reason. Egg white protein powder is made by dehydrating pasteurized egg whites into a fine powder. No dairy. No lactose. One of nature's most bioavailable protein sources in powder form.

EGG WHITE PROTEIN WINS AT:

✓ Completely dairy-free and lactose-free — no GI drama

✓ Complete protein: all 9 essential amino acids, just like whey

✓ High PDCAAS and DIAAS scores — recommended by bariatric dietitians

✓ Naturally low in fat and carbs — clean macro profile

✓ Extremely versatile — dissolves into baking, oatmeal, and savory dishes

✓ Great option for dairy-sensitive patients who can't tolerate whey

One honest note: Whey isolate edges out egg white slightly for satiety and post-workout muscle protein synthesis speed. Our hierarchy: whey isolate first, egg white as a strong second — especially for dairy-sensitive patients.

SECTION 5 — PLANT-BASED PROTEIN: THE HONEST TRUTH

PLANT-BASED PROTEIN: HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Plant-based powders are everywhere — pea, brown rice, hemp, soy, oat. Some people have dairy allergies or ethical preferences. We're not here to shame that. But we are here to give you facts.

The Core Problem: With the exception of soy, hemp, and chia, most plant proteins are incomplete proteins — missing essential amino acids your body can't produce. The PDCAAS score for most plant proteins ranges 0.25–0.75 vs. whey's perfect 1.0. Your body absorbs less protein per gram.

WATCH OUT FOR WITH PLANT-BASED POWDERS:

• Incomplete amino acid profiles in single-source powders

• Lower leucine content = less muscle protein synthesis signal

• Antinutrients that reduce absorption (phytates, tannins)

• Often higher in additives and thickeners to improve texture

• Artificial sweeteners still common — read the label just as carefully

Bottom line: If plant-based is your only option, choose a blend (pea + brown rice) with a complete amino acid profile, stevia or monk fruit, and third-party testing. But if you can tolerate dairy or egg white — those will serve your goals better.

SECTION 6 — SWEETENERS & ADDITIVES

THE SWEETENER SECTION NOBODY READS (BUT SHOULD)

Flip your protein powder tub around and look past the macros. What's sweetening it? This matters — especially post-op when your gut is recalibrated and your tolerance for certain compounds has changed.

✓ CHOOSE THESE	✗ AVOID THESE
Stevia leaf extract	Sucralose (Splenda)
Monk fruit extract	Acesulfame Potassium (Ace-K)
Combination of both	Aspartame
Unsweetened / unflavored	Sugar alcohols (maltitol, sorbitol, xylitol)

Sucralose and acesulfame potassium are the most common artificial sweeteners in protein powder. Research links them to gut microbiome disruption, altered insulin response, and continued sweet cravings that make it harder to reset your relationship with food. Post-op, you're trying to rebuild habits — you don't need your protein shake working against that.

Sugar alcohols like maltitol, sorbitol, and xylitol are poorly absorbed and frequently cause cramping, bloating, and diarrhea post-op. Hard pass. Stevia and monk fruit are plant-derived, don't spike blood sugar, and are well-tolerated even with a sensitive post-op gut. Every powder we recommend passes this test.

Other Red Flag Ingredients:

OTHER RED FLAG INGREDIENTS:

- Maltodextrin — raises blood sugar rapidly, often hidden in "natural flavors"
- Carrageenan — linked to GI inflammation, common in RTD shakes
- Hydrogenated oils / added fats — unnecessary and calorie-dense
- Artificial colors (Red 40, Blue 1) — zero nutritional value

SECTION 7 — OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BRANDS WE RECOMMEND

Every brand below passes our criteria: whey isolate or egg white base, stevia or monk fruit only, no artificial sweeteners, minimal fillers, clean label.

Whey Isolate — Top Picks

Transparent Labs Whey Isolate

WHEY ISOLATE STEVIA

Grass-fed, 28g protein per scoop. One of the cleanest labels on the market. No fillers, no artificial anything.

Momentous Essential Whey Isolate

WHEY ISOLATE MONK FRUIT + STEVIA

NSF + Informed Sport certified. Grass-fed European dairy. 20g protein. Includes ProHydrolase enzymes for better absorption.

Legion Whey+ Isolate

WHEY ISOLATE STEVIA

22g protein. Certified grass-fed Irish whey. Independently lab-tested via Labdoor. No artificial sweeteners, dyes, or fillers.

Levels Grass-Fed Whey

WHEY ISOLATE STEVIA + MONK FRUIT

Short, clean ingredient list. Grass-fed, naturally flavored, no junk. Easy to find online.

Egg White Protein — Top Picks

Naked Egg

EGG WHITE UNSWEETENED

Two ingredients: egg white protein + sunflower lecithin. 25g protein. Unflavored — mix it into anything.

Legion Egg+

EGG WHITE STEVIA + MONK FRUIT

80%+ protein by weight. No artificial sweeteners, dyes, or fillers. NSF-certified facility.

Proven Egg (Gaspari Nutrition)

EGG WHITE STEVIA

25g protein per scoop. Free-range egg whites, no artificial sweeteners, no dairy, no gluten. Unflavored version is single ingredient.

Plant-Based — If You Need It

KOS Organic Plant Protein

PLANT-BASED MONK FRUIT + STEVIA

Pea + flax + quinoa + pumpkin seed + chia blend. Complete amino profile. Digestive enzymes included.

Orgain Organic Plant Protein

PLANT-BASED STEVIA

Widely available. Pea + brown rice + chia blend. Solid accessibility option when other brands aren't in reach.

BEFORE YOU BUY: RUN IT THROUGH THIS LIST

Flip the tub over and check these boxes. Fails more than one? Put it back.

- ✓ Base: Whey isolate, egg white protein, or a complete plant-based blend
- ✓ Protein per serving: 20g or more
- ✓ Sweetener: Stevia or monk fruit ONLY
- ✓ No sucralose, aspartame, acesulfame potassium, or sugar alcohols
- ✓ No maltodextrin in the first 5 ingredients
- ✓ No artificial colors or carrageenan
- ✓ Third-party tested (NSF, Informed Sport, or Informed Choice preferred)
- ✓ Short, readable ingredient list — can't pronounce half of it? Pass.

READY TO STOP GUESSING AND START BUILDING?

Download the Rewrite app for a step-by-step protein plan
built for your body, your surgery, and your goals.

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