Pre-Workout, Creatine and Protein Supplements: The basics

Supplements can be confusing as fuck. It’s hard to get good information when every brand out there says that theirs is “scientifically proven” to be the best. Plus, the meat-head cashier at the supplement shop is shoving 45 different kinds of pills/powders down your throat, you think you heard about a kid in high-school who had a heart attack after taking Creatine, your lifting buddy swears that the new pre-workout he’s taking is the best thing since anabolic steroids, and if you don’t try it you’re a weak-dick.

Basically, if the information is coming off the front of a supplement container, take it with a scoop of salt. Or two scoops, for good measure.

So anyway, here’s my take on the three I get asked about most:

**Should You Take a Protein Supplement?**

People ask me this all the time, and it depends on how you’re exercising and how much you’re eating. According to the American Council on Exercise, most Americans get enough protein in their diet as it is. **Any extra protein you ingest is just going to go down the toilet or be converted to fat.** To figure out if you need any extra protein, here are some basic guidelines:

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| --- | --- |
| **Person (adult)**  | **Grams of Protein/Day** |
| Average Joe | 1g/kg of body weight |
| Endurance Athlete | 1.2-1.4g/kg of body weight |
| Strength Athlete | 1.6-1.7/kg of body weight |
| Vegetarian Athletes | Start with above numbers and add %10 |

Whenever possible, it’s best to get your protein from whole foods with high-quality protein (Quality is based on digestibility and the completeness of the amino-acid profile. Eggs are a good example of a food with high-quality protein.) If you’re like me though, you have about as much nutritional organization and planning capacity as a stoned 2 year old. Protein supplements can be a convenient alternative to cooking or junk food. Or starvation - if that’s the level of Bachelor/Broke-Ass-College-Student you’re currently on.

So you’ve done your homework and decided that a protein supplement might be a good idea for you, but you get to the store and there’s 234928347298 different kinds of protein, all with shiny labels and more X’s and Z’s in the name than any trustworthy brand should have. In general, I would skip any fancy stuff and stick with Whey Protein Isolate, Casein or both. Soy is alright for females, but as a guy I wouldn’t use it as a supplement. Here’s a quick run-down:

**Whey:**

Whey is just what’s left after milk has been curdled and strained. Nothing scary. It has a complete amino acid profile, it’s easily digested, it’s generally lactose free, it’s available with low cholesterol and there’s a wide body of research supporting its safety and efficacy. Additionally, studies have found that whey protein can also enhance cognitive development, promote bone repair and formation, improve wound healing, reduce blood pressure, stimulate the immune system, inhibit joint inflammation in osteoarthritis, as well as stimulate muscle protein synthesis even more than other high-quality proteins like casein and soy. POW. But who cares about any of that stuff. GOTTA GET DEM GAINS. It should be noted though, that there are different kinds of Whey Protein supplements that have different percentages of protein by weight:

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| --- | --- |
| Type of Protein Supplement | % Protein by Weight |
| Why Protein Isolate | 90% + |
| Whey Protein Concentrate | 29-89% |
| Whey Protein "Powder" | 11-15% |



Whey Protein Isolate is the pure stuff, and is going to give you the best bang for your buck. Hydrolyzed Why Protein Isolate typically comes with lower cholesterol and is supposedly absorbed more quickly than regular WPI, but I wouldn’t pay extra for it unless cholesterol is a concern for you.

**Casein:**

Casein is also just a part of milk. It’s also a great protein, just different. Your body will absorb it more slowly than it will Whey, which gives your body a slow but steady supply of amino-acids in the blood-stream (just think of amino-acids as protein for now). That way your muscles can begin recovering immediately after they’ve been through a session of intensive resistance training.

*“Studies suggest that combined casein and whey may produce the greatest muscular strength improvements after an intensive resistance training program* (source needed)*”*

**Soy:**

Soy is unique because it’s one of the only plant proteins with a complete Amino Acid Profile. It’s also very digestible, making it a high quality protein, and it’s free of cholesterol. Some studies have suggested that certain soy protein can slightly raise your estrogen levels, so if waking up in a woman’s body would be an issue for you, steer clear of this shit. If not, then more power to ya, bud! Follow your dreams. (Jk. See a therapist) Soy has been shown to raise blood estrogen levels in men, but only very slightly. Personally, as a dude, I wouldn’t use it as a protein supplement, but I don’t make an effort to avoid it in other foods either.

That should be enough to get you started. Comment below with any questions, or what topics you’d like to hear about next.