



Protein Drinks may be Poison, Literally

By Wendy Marks
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Where Are You Getting Your Protein?

I don't know about you, but I don't get sufficient protein in my normal daily diet. I eat a lot of fruits and vegetables and tend to snack in that direction, especially now with yummy organic apricots and berries not as expensive as other times of year. I'm always conscious of calories and fats, especially animal fats, and too much reliance on nuts, both of which can be hard to digest and highly caloric, so I drink a protein shake in the morning and feel like that takes care of me for the day, for about 150 calories. Not a bad deal, I thought. Each day I assess my protein intake to try to increase it, but even as an omnivore I just don't get all the protein I should.

I always learn more from my clients than I teach, and this week a woman brought up the subject of the lead content of her organic protein powder. I was shocked, as it was a costly well-known brand. I said I'd look into it, so I went digging— and oh my what a surprise. Below you will find what I dug up. But first: what do we need?

"The US Department of Agriculture recommends that all men and women over the age of 19 should get at least 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day (or 0.37 grams per pound). That means a woman who is 130 pounds should get at least 48 grams of protein, which could look like 7 ounces of salmon or 7 eggs."

If you are active, that number is higher. And men are recommended to have even more. My, my, seven eggs! Even as a hard core egg lover (when I was a vegetarian I still ate eggs), that's a boatload.

As you will see below, I'll be quoting from a report on protein powders that appeared on the website Food Safety News, based on information from the site cleanlabelproject.org. Both of these web sites are worth checking into. Clean Label Project rates individual brands for several different factors, including heavy metals and hormones. I was quite surprised that many of my "go-to" brands were really bad. They had very high levels for both heavy metals and for hormones. YIKES!

"Healthy eating enthusiasts may want to reconsider their protein powder choices in light of a new study that shows 40 percent of 134 brands tested have elevated levels of heavy metals, with certified organic products twice as likely to contain heavy metals as non-organic powders.

The 2018 study by the Denver-based Clean Label Project used the independent analytical chemistry laboratory Ellipse Analytics to test the animal- and plant-based

protein powders. Clean Label selected and purchased the powders from retail store shelves and from online sources.

In addition to heavy metals, the research project included testing for BPA, a known endocrine disruptor. Results showed 55 percent of powders tested had measurable levels of BPA. Of the 134 tested powders, 28 contained twice the regulatory limit of 3 micrograms of BPA. One contained more than 25 times the allowed level of BPA in just one serving.

The specific products tested in the Clean Label study are ranked the top sellers, according to statistics from Nielsen and the Amazon.com best-seller list. According to the research report released today, of the 134 products tested, 53 were found to have “substantially elevated” levels of the following heavy metals:

- Lead
- Mercury
- Cadmium
- Arsenic
- BPA

In addition to finding that the products certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are twice as likely to contain high levels of heavy metals as non-organic protein powders, the study found other surprising statistics about plant-based protein powders: 75 percent had measurable levels of lead. Each contained on average twice the amount of lead per serving as other products. In addition to lead, the plant powders in several cases contained mercury, cadmium and arsenic above health-based guidelines.

Clean Label Project Director Jackie Bowen said the toxins found in the plant products could put people who follow vegetarian diets at heightened risk of health issues if they are regularly consuming the plant-based powders. The powders had, on average, twice the amount of lead per serving of other products.

The director of operations and quality at the testing laboratory Ellipse Analytics said there could be several explanations as to why the powders have excessive levels of heavy metals. “Plant-based protein powders have higher levels of heavy metals than non-plant-based protein powders,” said Sean Callan, the Ellipse Analytics scientist. This could be due to the locations where the protein powder manufacturers’ plant ingredients are sourced having contaminated soil. This is especially true in the United States where there may be a higher incidence of heavy metals in the soil of some regions.” Testing further revealed that about 10 percent of whey-based protein powders contained lead levels above health guidelines.

Good news coming out of the research was the finding that no egg-based protein powders tested contained lead. The study data was analyzed by Clean Label Project's Technical Advisory Board of statisticians, epidemiologists, food safety scientists and registered dietitians before being published. The study is in process of being peer-reviewed.

Study results on the nonprofit's website are presented in a five-star rating system that names each product tested and shows how contaminated it is compared to other products in the same study. More than 40 of the products tested only received one star."

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So I would encourage all of you who use protein powders to look yours up and see the alternatives. As the supplement market gets more and more lucrative and big companies continue to buy up our favorite brands, vigilance is even more important.

Namaste,

Wendy Marks