

Who doesn't love the idea of heading into the kitchen and using one quick machine to get in a variety of nutrients, all while you're still half asleep and have no idea what you're even going to wear for work? This is the beauty of the blender, and if you're looking for a way to get in a variety of nutrients into one meal, definitely try these blender concoctions!

Smoothies are all the rage right now, but not all of them are as healthy as they have the potential to be. Many are packed with sugar, containing over an entire day's worth. Others are lacking in fibre, and many are lacking in protein.

While we certainly don't need an overabundance of protein (unless we're looking to get ripped like a vegan bodybuilder) we still need some protein in our diet so that our body functions properly. Protein propels neurotransmitter activity, repairs muscles and aids in re-growth, and keeps your metabolism and digestion working properly. The beauty of protein is it's just as easy to get in our diet as healthy complex carbohydrates and healthy fats are. And while protein powders are awesome and convenient, they aren't always 100 percent necessary. Not all of them are budget-friendly either, especially if you're tight on smoothie-making funds.

Making a whole food, protein-rich smoothie is like making an investment towards your health. It's a way to start the day out with nutrients, satiety, and energy the plant-powered way. And no, you don't need whey protein to get you there; you just need to be using these whole food protein sources (or any other favourites you have) instead.

Here are some of the best protein combos to use in place of protein powder in your favourite smoothie:

1. Oats and Spinach

This award winning protein duo works great in smoothies because not only are these two foods high in protein but also magnesium and potassium. This combo is also low in fat if that's a concern you have. Oats contain 7 grams of protein per half cup and spinach contains 5 grams per cup. Adding 2 cups of spinach and 1/2 cup oats will lend you 17 grams of protein! Spinach also alkalizes the body to ward off inflammation, and the magnesium in oats and spinach also support muscle and bone health, along with energy and regularity. These two foods are also mild in flavour and will add a creamy, slightly nutty flavour to your smoothie. Use organic sprouted gluten-free oats such as Rude Health brand.

2. Hemp Seeds and Kale

These seeds contain 13 grams per 3 tablespoons. They're also rich in iron and magnesium, just like kale, which contains 5 grams of protein per cup. Use 3 tablespoons of hemp seeds and one cup of kale to get 18 grams of protein in your smoothie. As another benefit, the healthy fats in hemp will help your body absorb the nutrients in kale much better, such as Vitamin A, E, and K, which are all fat-soluble.

3. Pumpkin Seeds and Oats

If you're out of greens, that's okay because pumpkin seeds are one of the most alkaline seeds you can eat (which you can see from their dark green colour that's an indicator of their high chlorophyll content). Pumpkin seeds contain 5 grams of protein per 1/4 cup, which is more than any grain or green per serve (aside from spirulina). Though they're high in fat, pumpkin seeds contain healthy fats that protect your heart and your brain. Oats pair well with pumpkin seeds flavour-wise, and both are rich in magnesium and potassium, along with iron and zinc. Use 1/4 cup pumpkin seeds and 1/2 cup oats to obtain 13 grams total protein.

4. Quinoa and Spinach

You can also use quinoa flakes or even whole quinoa in your smoothies as another creative option. While quinoa isn't something you might think to add to a smoothie, it lends a mild, nutty flavour that's easily masked with a little green apple and some blackberries or blueberries. Quinoa is also a great source of iron, magnesium, and potassium, which compliments the nutrients in spinach perfectly. Use 1/2 cup of uncooked whole quinoa for 12 grams of protein, or one half cup of cooked quinoa if you have some already prepared in your fridge. Use 2 cups of spinach for 10 grams of protein which will lend you 22 grams total!

5. Almond Butter and Chia Seeds

These two healthy fats are a great way to boost your energy if you're watching your carbohydrate intake. Both are excellent sources of magnesium, along with protein and potassium. For the healthiest option, use raw, unsalted almond butter, which contains no added oils or salt. Two tablespoons of almond butter lends 7-8 grams of protein and 2 tablespoons of chia seeds will provide you with 5 grams of protein. This gives you a total of around 12 grams of protein, which is great for those who aren't crazy about using a lot of protein-rich foods.

6. Chia Seeds and Kale

For an iron-rich boost, go with chia seeds and kale. Both are amazing sources of energy thanks to their B vitamin, magnesium, iron, protein, and potassium content. Use 2 cups of kale, which provides 10 grams of protein and 1/4 cup chia seeds which also provides 10 grams of protein. You'll get 20 grams of protein from this one simple combo, and likely not be hungry for hours thanks to chia's filling factor. Since chia and kale are high in fibre they'll also provide you with major blood sugar-boosting benefits.

You can easily combine and mix and match any of these to meet your protein needs or desires. Other foods can also be used that are rich in protein as well if you have any other favourites to use in smoothies I haven't mentioned here. While powders are amazing and quick, simple, lower calorie ways to add protein to a smoothie, the foods above are more whole food sources, and will probably keep you full much longer than a powder will.

Now, get your blenders out and try a whole food, protein-packed smoothie for your next morning meal!