

Protein Supplementation for Surgery Recovery

Why it matters, how much, and what to buy

Why protein matters for your recovery

When you undergo major surgery, your body enters what is known as a **catabolic state**. To provide the energy needed for healing, your body begins to **break down your own muscle tissue**.^{1,2}

To counteract this and give you the best possible outcome, we recommend supplemental protein. Adequate protein intake:

- **Preserves muscle mass.** It helps your body maintain and repair muscle during recovery.^{3,4}
- **Reduces complications.** Patients who maintain adequate protein levels often have fewer post-operative complications.⁵

If you take a GLP-1 medication, this matters even more.

If you take **Ozempic, Wegovy, Zepbound** or a similar medication, protein matters even more. These medications blunt appetite so much that most people on them eat far too little protein: in a 2026 study of 387 adults taking them, **average protein intake was about 33 grams a day, and fewer than one in ten met the recommended amount**.⁶ They also accelerate the loss of muscle along with fat.⁷

Tell the office if you are taking one of these. It changes more than your protein plan.

Your protein protocol

We recommend an additional **25–30 grams of protein, twice a day**:

When	What to do
2 weeks BEFORE surgery	25–30 g of protein, twice a day.
2 weeks AFTER surgery	25–30 g of protein, twice a day.
If you have low muscle mass	Start a protein supplement once a day, right now — don't wait for the two-week window.

Sources

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 2. Ferrando AA et al. Pre- and post-surgical nutrition for preservation of muscle mass after orthopedic surgery. *Nutrients* 2021;13:1675. doi.org/10.3390/nu13051675
 3. Dreyer HC et al. Essential amino acid supplementation in patients following total knee arthroplasty. *J Clin Invest* 2013;123:4654–66. doi.org/10.1172/JCI70160 — randomized trial: supplementation cut thigh-muscle loss from 14% to 3% at two weeks.
 4. Khani A et al. Peri-operative protein or amino acid supplementation for total joint arthroplasty: systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Orthop Surg Res* 2025. doi.org/10.1186/s13018-025-05847-4 — 19 studies, 903 patients.
 5. Tischler EH et al. Hypoalbuminemia and perioperative mortality, reoperation and readmission after total joint arthroplasty. *Eur J Orthop Surg Traumatol* 2025. doi.org/10.1007/s00590-025-04468-1 — low blood protein roughly doubles reoperation and readmission.
 6. Korus S et al. Dietary intake patterns and nutritional adequacy among adults treated with GLP-1 or dual GIP/GLP-1 receptor agonists. *J Transl Med* 2026;24:532. doi.org/10.1186/s12967-026-07702-4
 7. Neeland IJ et al. Changes in lean body mass with GLP-1-based therapies and mitigation strategies. *Diabetes Obes Metab* 2024. doi.org/10.1111/dom.15728
- Full reference list: www.quietkneeolsen.com/protein-and-nutrition

Recommended products

Any of these will work. Choose based on taste, convenience, cost, and any dietary restrictions you have. **You do not need to buy a specific brand** — these are options patients have found to work well.

1. EnRoute — Convenient daily packets

Best for patients who want easy, pre-portioned daily dosing.

Where to buy: Information is in your pre-op folder.

Discount: A discount code is on the handout provided at booking.

2. Levels Protein Powder — High quality / clean

Best for patients concerned about purity — known to be free of heavy metal contaminants such as lead.

Where to buy: Online at levelsprotein.com · Costco (online) · Target Pharmacy, in the protein aisle.

How long it lasts: The 1.5 lb jar at Target lasts about 11 days at twice daily — close enough if you are already healthy.

3. Prime Protein — Dairy-free

Best for patients with dairy sensitivities or restrictions.

Where to buy: equipfoods.com

How much to buy: Buy 3 packs and use 1.5 scoops per serving.

4. Mend Protein — High performance

Best for patients who want a product with a strong track record in total joint patients. It has been well studied.

Where to buy: Use the discount code provided at booking.

Fair warning: it does not taste great, but it works well. Mix it into a fruit smoothie or your favorite beverage.

5. Mullins Whey Protein Isolate — A Midwest (Wisconsin) product

Best for patients who want a locally made product: rBGH free, antibiotic free, gluten free, soy free.

Why an isolate: whey protein isolates tend to test low for heavy metals — the extra filtration that strips out lactose and fat also removes most minerals, and whey contains no plant ingredients, which is where most heavy-metal contamination in protein powders comes from.

Where to buy: store.mullinswhey.com (many flavors; unflavored available).

How much to buy: Two 2 lb bags (about 28 servings each) cover the two weeks before and two weeks after surgery at twice a day.

Paying for it

Many patients can use HSA or FSA funds to purchase protein supplements. Check with your plan administrator.

This handout is general guidance for surgical recovery, not individualized nutrition advice. If you have **kidney disease**, **liver disease**, or any condition requiring a protein-restricted diet, **do not start a protein supplement without talking to us or to the physician who manages that condition first**. If you are unsure, call the office.