The use of protein supplementation among fitness center attendees. The protein project

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Letter to Editor

Nowadays, in a gym context we may find three people among ten who declare protein supplements consumption. Health, physical fitness, self esteem, performance and muscle hypertrophy are usually the main reasons inducing such kind of consumption. It well documented that particularly active individuals use supplements to build muscle, gain strength or prevent future diseases and illnesses. Furthermore, scientific researchers have shown that in general people have different opinions about the use of supplements and the appropriate food to eat. As reported by Bianco and colleagues in 2011, proteins are the most widely ingested supplements in people attending commercial gyms and supplement users also ate higher protein content foods in respect to those who did not supplement.

It is clear that there is an increased interest in what is considered “proper” nutrition and what is the best nutritional strategy to optimize exercise training workouts. Dietary behaviour is in fact a complex phenomenon; food-based approaches are regarded as the long-term strategy for improving nutrition. These require significant efforts and appropriate planning in order to include certain specific macronutrients or supplements in everyday’s diet. Dieting or unhealthy eating practices, (such as eating foods deemed as “bad” by the dieter), in one way or another, may be associated with long-term weight gain.

Previous studies have shown discrepant rates of supplement intake amongst subjects that exercise in gyms. These different findings might be explained by different gyms and people enrolled. Probably an under or over-
reported use of such supplements, or an incorrect knowledge of what is considered a supplement may lead to such results. As mentioned before, proteins are the most widely consumed supplement in commercial gyms, although association of protein supplements and food consumption is a poorly researched field. It is to date unclear whether those more inclined to supplement also have healthier dietary patterns. As shown by Pechey and colleagues in 2010, socioeconomic status is another factor influencing the quality of food intake, highlighting that low socioeconomic status people usually purchase a greater proportion of unhealthy foods and beverages. Conversely, high socioeconomic status people purchase greater proportions of fibres, proteins and total sugars, and smaller proportions of sodium.

The Author with this letter wants to point out the importance of epidemiological studies able to cover the lack knowledge that at this moment is present on this field. The common questions are: 1) Who is taking protein supplements nowadays? 2) There are enough information about? Within commercial gyms? Personal Trainers and Fitness Instructors are enough qualified to prescribe supplements? Are proteins really necessary to obtain results? Which kind of association is the most favourite in case of protein consumption?

In this context falls the Protein Project PP (www.proteinproject.com). The PP is a scientific project of ten years duration (2011-2021) leaded by the University of Palermo in collaboration with many partners from all of the world. It is composed by three different epidemiological studies: Study A) Population Target - Commercial Gym attendees, Study design, Face-to-face interview; Study B) Population Target - Commercial Gym attendees, Study design, Self Reporting Questionnaire; Study C) Population Target - Net Surfers Study design, Self Reporting Online Short Questionnaire.

The main purpose of this project is to monitor the use of protein supplementation, alone or in association with other supplements amongst regular fitness center attendees. Moreover, Authors are interested in sources of information, dietary behaviour, quality of training and quality of life of people who are attending commercial gyms (appendix a).
References


prteinproject.com

Research Unit ID _____________

Date ________________  ID Participant ________________

Age (yrs) ___  Sex (m/f) ___  H (cm) ___  W (kg) ___  Education (yrs) ___

1. Do you practice any physical activities?     YES ☐       NO ☐

2. If yes! What kind of activity are you practicing ?     _____________________________

   2.1 Since when (years) ?  _______

3. How many days per week ?  _______

4. How many hours per day ?  _______

5. Please type all places you practice physical activities     __________        __________

6. Are you using protein supplements ?     NO ☐       Yes ☐

   6.1 If not, have you ever used them in past ?     NO ☐       Yes ☐
   (even if only once, answer yes)

   6.2 If yes, which ? (if possible, Brand / Trademark)  ________________

       6.2.1 Since when (months/years) ?  ________________

       6.2.2 How many days per week ?  ________________

       6.2.3 What kind (per day) ?

   Protein Bar        Whey/Egg/Mix Protein        Protein drink

   nr  _________  gr  __________  ml  __________


Note:  ________________________  ________________________  ________________________

Mainly mixed with  Water or Milk
6.2.4 Are you taking protein supplements in association with (e.g. Creatine, Amino Acids, Weight gain, Weight loss, Vitamins, Anabolic Steroids, ecc…)?

Please type here ___________________________________________________

6.2.5 Who suggested you their use:

- Coach
- Myself, it was my idea
- Internet, Web
- Physician
- Nutritionist
- Friends

Other: _______________________________________

7. Are you following any specific food regimen?  

NO □  Yes □

If yes, please type the name here ___________________________________

8. Frequency of use of the following foods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>days/week</th>
<th>___</th>
<th>___</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
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<td>Cheese</td>
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<td>Chicken / Turkey</td>
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<td>Eggs</td>
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<td>Vegetables</td>
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<td>Bakery</td>
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<td>Cold cuts</td>
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<td>Yogurt</td>
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<td>Meat</td>
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<td>Fish</td>
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<td>Nuts</td>
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<td>Snacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canned tuna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legumes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. Are you able to jog nonstop for 50 minutes?

- Yes
- No
- I have never tried

10. Report time spent sitting during a typical day (for study purposes, work purposes or study and work purposes)

- 1-3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 5-8 hours
- 8-10 hours
- > 10 hours

(No weekend or holiday)