

# Eating fewer protein-rich foods may harm our physical function as we grow older

*Research shows that people who consume insufficient amounts of protein are more likely to experience increasing difficulty with everyday activities over time.*

SHARJAH, EMIRATE OF SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, May 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Researchers have found that consuming lower amounts of protein-rich foods may negatively affect physical functioning as people grow older, underscoring the vital function protein plays in preserving mobility and muscle strength in adulthood.

In a large aging cohort study published in the journal *Nutrients*, the researchers report that regular dietary habits, particularly the consumption of protein-rich foods, can influence how well individuals move and perform daily activities later in life.



Everyday foods, such as milk, yogurt, eggs, legumes, fish, and poultry, may collectively support healthier aging when consumed regularly. Credit: L. Yousif

The study was jointly conducted by an international team of researchers from the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, Roskilde University in Denmark, the University of Helsinki in Finland, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University in Pakistan, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Saudi Arabia, and the Medical University of Vienna in Austria.

Led by Dr. Rizwan Qaisar, associate professor of muscle cell physiology at the University of Sharjah, the research team analyzed data from more than 38,000 adults aged fifty and above from 27 European countries. The data were drawn from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe. Participants were followed over several years, allowing researchers to compare their long-term eating habits with changes in physical strength and daily functioning.

The results of the analysis prompted the researchers to believe that adults who frequently consumed lower amounts of protein-rich foods, such as eggs, legumes, fish, and chicken, were more likely to develop reduced muscle strength and increased difficulty in performing everyday activities over time.

“The findings showed that individuals with consistently low protein intake were more likely to report problems with walking short distances, climbing stairs, reaching overhead, or managing routine tasks such as shopping,” said Dr. Qaisar. “These associations were particularly noticeable in older adults, and patterns differed somewhat between men and women.”



The study suggests that adults who frequently consume lower amounts of protein-rich foods, such as eggs, legumes, fish, and chicken, were more likely to develop reduced muscle strength and increased difficulty in performing everyday activities over time.

### Low protein intake and physical impairments

Scientists link functional impairments, such as a progressive decline in the ability to perform daily tasks, including climbing stairs, rising from a chair, walking, and maintaining balance, to a consequence commonly associated with aging.

“Simple movements such as walking, standing up, or carrying groceries require muscle strength, balance, and coordination,” explains Dr. Qaisar. “When protein intake is low over long periods, the body may struggle to maintain these systems, increasing the risk of functional decline and loss of independence.”

The authors emphasize that these limitations not only diminish independence and quality of life but also elevate the risk of falls, hospitalization, and placement in long-term care facilities. “Functional decline is multifactorial, involving musculoskeletal deterioration, neurological changes, and nutritional deficiencies,” they note.

Importantly, the study examined real-world dietary patterns rather than supplements or restrictive diets. It highlights how everyday foods, such as milk, yogurt, eggs, legumes, fish, and poultry, may collectively support healthier aging when consumed regularly.

Given that dietary habits can be modified, the researchers emphasize the practical implications

of their findings. Identifying older adults with low protein intake could provide an opportunity for early, low-cost interventions aimed at preserving mobility, independence, and overall quality of life.

“Functional decline and sarcopenia are major aging-related concerns. While protein intake is known to influence muscle health, its longitudinal impact on strength and physical function across age and gender remains underexplored,” they write. “We assessed whether low protein intake correlates with future onset of low handgrip strength (HGS) and physical impairments in older adults.”

### Protein intake and active and independent living

As populations age worldwide, the authors suggest that attention to simple lifestyle factors, such as routine food choices, may help delay physical decline and support longer periods of active, independent living.

This large, multi-country study of older European adults found that lower habitual protein intake was independently associated with higher odds of reduced handgrip strength and difficulty performing mobility-related activities.

The association between protein intake and handgrip strength was stronger in men, whereas functional limitations, such as walking 100 meters, stooping, kneeling, extending the arm above the shoulders, and shopping for groceries, were more commonly reported among women. “These findings indicate an association between habitual protein intake and short-term changes,” the authors noted.

Dr. Qaisar emphasized that protein is not solely important for athletes seeking to build muscle. Rather, consistent intake from common dietary sources plays a crucial role in maintaining strength and the capacity to perform everyday activities, particularly with advancing age.

“Altogether, this study demonstrates that lower habitual protein intake is associated with a higher likelihood of short-term incident muscle weakness and functional difficulties among older European adults,” the authors conclude. “These findings suggest that habitual protein intake may play a contributory role in maintaining physical function in aging populations.”

Original Source URL: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13075100/#sec5-nutrients-18-01058>

LEON BARKHO  
University Of Sharjah  
+971 50 165 4376  
[email us here](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/915894800>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.