



Are protein bars good for you?

Head to the “nutrition” or “health food” aisle at your local supermarket, and you’ll find a dizzying array of protein bars. With a market size of over a billion dollars, it’s no surprise that there are so many different kinds, each promising benefits like increased energy, muscle building, and even weight loss. But are protein bars healthy? Let’s break it down.

Ingredients in Protein Bars

The ingredients in protein bars can vary significantly from one brand to another. Some bars are packed with high-quality whole food ingredients, are low in added sugar and artificial additives. However, others contain high levels of added sugar, unhealthy fats, and artificial ingredients. It’s important to read the labels carefully. Look for bars with a short list of recognizable ingredients, at least a few grams of fiber, and minimal added sugar.

What Does Research Say?

Research on protein bars is mixed. Some studies suggest that protein bars can be a convenient way to meet your daily protein needs, especially for athletes or those with busy lifestyles. However, nutrition experts agree that people do not need processed foods like bars to meet their protein needs - that’s what food is for!

Protein Bars vs. Whole Foods

While protein bars can be a convenient option, they shouldn’t replace whole foods in your diet. Whole foods provide not just protein but also essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber – nutrients that are often lost in processed foods like protein bars. Whole foods are also generally more satiating, meaning they can help you feel full longer and prevent overeating.

Benefits of Protein Bars

Protein bars do offer some clear benefits. They are convenient, portable, and can be a quick source of energy, especially when you’re on the go. They can support athletic training goals, like post-workout recovery. They also come in a variety of flavors, making them an appealing option for those looking to replace ultraprocessed snacks like cookies, donuts, and neon orange puffs.

Potential Risks

Too much protein can lead to excess calorie intake, leading to weight gain. Some bars contain sugar alcohols (those ending in “-ol”), which can cause digestive issues like bloating and gas. Relying too heavily on protein bars can lead to a lack of variety in your diet, compromising your diet quality.

Recognize Clever Marketing

The protein bar market is filled with clever marketing tactics. Terms like “zero net carbs,” “energy,” and “superfood” can be misleading. And eating them won’t make you fit and strong. Just because a bar has these labels doesn’t necessarily mean it’s healthy. Always check the nutrition facts and ingredient list to make an informed choice.

The Bottom Line

The average person does not need more protein in their diet. Protein bars can be a convenient food when you need a quick snack, but they’re not a health food. If you like them, indulge now and then. But mindful of the ingredients and nutritional content, and don’t be swayed by marketing gimmicks. Balance is key to a healthy diet, and protein bars are just one piece of the puzzle.

DIY Protein Bars



Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup no sugar added shredded coconut (measure packed)
- 1/2 cup shelled hemp seeds or chia seeds
- 1/2 cup sesame seeds
- 1/2 cup shelled pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- 1 1/2 cups mixed nuts, chopped into small chunks
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup peanut butter (or other nut butter)
- 1/4 cup date paste or maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350F. Cover a 8x8 square pan with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, combine the coconut, seeds, nuts, raisins and cinnamon.
3. In a large saucepan, stir together the peanut butter with the date paste over medium heat. Once it's well combined, stir in vanilla and set aside.
4. Pour the nut butter mixture into the bowl and mix well so that everything is well combined. You may need to add a few drops of water to help the mixture stick together.
5. Transfer to the pan and press down firmly to form a flat, even layer.
6. Bake for 15 minutes until golden brown.
7. Leave to cool before cutting into 12 bars. Keep in an air-tight container for up to a week.