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Highest Quality Proteins to Consume

This is a summary of the highest-quality dietary protein sources—those with the best amino-acid profile, high digestibility, and strong evidence supporting muscle repair, immune function, and overall health.

What Makes a “High-Quality” Protein?

- Contains all 9 essential amino acids
- Has high digestibility
- Has a strong leucine content (important for muscle protein synthesis)
- Scores highly on quality metrics like PDCAAS or DIAAS

Top Animal-Based High-Quality Proteins

Animal proteins are generally the most complete and best absorbed.

1. Eggs (especially egg whites)

- The gold standard protein (PDCAAS = 1.0)
- Perfect amino-acid profile
- Highly digestible
- Egg whites = pure protein with no fat

2. Whey Protein (Concentrate or Isolate)

- Highest leucine content of any common protein
- Fastest digestion → ideal post-workout
- Very high DIAAS score
- Big impact on muscle hypertrophy

3. Casein Protein

- Slow-digesting (6–8 hours)
- Reduces muscle breakdown
- Good before bed or during fasting windows

4. Fish (especially salmon, tuna, sardines, cod)

- Lean, highly digestible protein
- Also rich in omega-3 fats
- Excellent amino-acid profile

5. Poultry (chicken, turkey)

- Lean, versatile, high-protein
- Easy for most people to digest

6. Red Meat (beef, bison, venison)

- High in heme iron, B12, creatine
- Complete protein with strong amino profile

7. Greek Yogurt / Skyr

- High protein per calorie
- Contains probiotics
- Slow-digesting casein + whey combination

Top Plant-Based High-Quality Proteins

Plant proteins are typically less complete, but there are several standouts.

1. Soy Protein (tofu, tempeh, edamame)

- One of the few complete plant proteins
- PDCAAS = 1.0 (same as whey/casein)
- High digestibility

2. Pea Protein (and pea-protein blends)

- Very high in leucine for a plant protein
- Often combined with rice protein to create full amino profile
- Highly digestible

3. Quinoa

- A complete protein grain
- Lower protein per gram, but excellent for plant-based eaters

4. Buckwheat

- Complete amino profile
- Good complementary protein source

5. Hemp Protein

- Contains omega-3 fats
- Not as high in leucine but good for variety

Highest DIAAS (Most Scientifically “Complete”)

DIAAS \geq 100 = excellent protein quality. Whey and eggs are among the most efficient options per gram for muscle and recovery.

Food / Protein	Approx. DIAAS Score
Whey isolate	~130
Milk protein	120+
Egg	115+
Beef	110+
Soy isolate	90–100
Pea protein	85–95

If your goal is overall health and muscle preservation:

- Include eggs, fish, meats, Greek yogurt, whey or casein
- For plant-based diets: soy, pea + rice blends, quinoa, tempeh, seitan

If your goal is maximizing muscle growth:

1. Whey isolate
2. Eggs
3. Meats & fish
4. Greek yogurt / cottage cheese
5. Pea + rice protein blends (if plant-based)