



Whey is a good quality protein, confirms Domingo J. Piñero, PhD, assistant professor of nutrition at New York University (NYU). However, he adds that we should beware of hype from supplement manufacturers who are out to aggressively promote their product. Although whey is a good protein source, Dr. Pinero takes issue with claims that it is superior to other protein products on health-food store shelves. Moreover, if you are allergic to milk, chances are that you are also going to have an allergic reaction to whey. *Daily Health News* contributing editor, Andrew L. Rubman, ND, adds that given that approximately 70% of the population has a sensitivity to dairy protein that may or may not show up as a tested allergenicity, chances are that using whey may have an allergenic impact on many.

That said, people who need extra protein or are simply looking for additional sources of protein in their diet can benefit from whey, I hear from Milly Ryan-Harshman, PhD, RD, a nutrition consultant and registered dietitian in Ontario, Canada.

### A BY-PRODUCT OF THE CHEESE-MAKING PROCESS

Whey protein is nothing new. We all remember the nursery rhyme, *Little Miss Muffet sat on her tuffet, eating her curds and whey*. It's more a case of "everything old is new again," as whey has resurfaced in recent years as a popular supplement.

So what exactly is it? Milk is composed of two proteins, 80% casein, or curd, and 20% whey. Whey is essentially the group name for the proteins that appear in the liquid you get when you separate casein in the cheese-making process, explains Dr. Pinero.

### WHEY TO GO

Incorporating proteins (such as meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese and tofu) in moderation into your diet is essential to good health. These important nutrients provide a valuable source of energy... play a key role in metabolism... and help build and repair muscles and bones. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), 10% to 35% of your daily calorie intake should come from protein. Whey can, indeed, play a part in that.

### HOW TO USE WHEY

If you're interested in giving it a try, whey protein comes as a powder that you can add to smoothies, shakes and the like. *There are two different forms...*

**Whey concentrate.** As Dr. Piñero explains it, the liquid that is derived from the cheese-making process contains fat, lactose, a mix of proteins (beta-lactoglobulin, alpha-lactalbumin, bovine serum albumin, immunoglobulins, lactoferrin, etc.) and minerals (also referred to as ash, because that's what you get after you burn everything else away). When these proteins are extracted through filtration, you end up with whey concentrate. This is composed of **65% to 80% protein**, with the remainder lactose, fat and minerals.

**Whey isolate.** If the process of filtration is more refined -- for example, by microfiltration, ion exchange or a whole myriad of other more sophisticated and expensive techniques -- the result is whey isolate. According to Dr. Pinero, this **contains more than 90% protein** and almost no fat or lactose. Not surprisingly, **whey isolate tends to be more expensive than the concentrate.**

## A WORD TO THE DAIRY SENSITIVE

Because whey is derived from cow's milk, it will act as an irritant to most people. Additionally, as I have written before, processed cow's milk unto itself can create autoimmune responses even in people who are not allergic to milk. (See *Daily Health News*, [June 30, 2003](#).) If you are not technically allergic to dairy, it is still a good idea to rotate your protein sources and not rely on whey on a daily basis.

## AN OPTION TO CONSIDER

The bottom line is that whey can be a good way to get additional protein into your diet, when used in moderation. As far as the promotion of whey as superior to other protein supplements, however, Dr. Piñero doesn't buy it. And, don't rely on it as your primary protein source. **It is better to rotate its use with other standard proteins and protein supplements, including soy isolate and egg white protein powder.**

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