

Protein-First After 40 — Free Starter Guide

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Hi, I'm Jill

If you're over 40 and doing everything "right" but your body isn't responding the way it used to, start with protein. It's the single change I see make the biggest difference for the women I coach.

I'm an ISSA-certified personal trainer and the coach behind Next Phase Physique. I work with women 40+ on strength, nutrition and body recomposition: losing fat while keeping, or building, the muscle that keeps you strong.

This guide gives you three things: your daily protein number, a simple way to build any meal around it, and a week of ideas plus a swap sheet so you're never stuck. You don't have to figure this out alone. Use this as your starting point, and if you want someone in your corner, my door is open at the end.

Why protein matters more after 40

After 40 we start losing muscle faster, and our bodies get less efficient at using the protein we eat. Eating more of it, spread through the day, is how you push back.

- **Muscle is your metabolism.** The more you keep, the more you burn at rest and the easier it is to stay lean.
- **It keeps you full.** Protein is the most filling thing on your plate, which makes cutting back on snacking far easier.
- **It makes your training count.** Lifting tells your body to build muscle; protein is what it builds with.
- **It's how recomposition works.** Fat comes off while muscle stays, so you get firmer and stronger, not just smaller.

Most women are surprised how far below their number they are the first time they track it. Closing that gap is often the first win.

Find your number

Aim for about **1 gram of protein per pound of your goal weight**, every day. Use your goal weight, not your current weight, because you're feeding the body you're building.

Goal weight	Daily protein	Across 3 meals + 1 snack
130 lb	130 g	about 35 g per meal + 25 g snack
145 lb	145 g	about 40 g per meal + 25 g snack
160 lb	160 g	about 45 g per meal + 25 g snack
175 lb	175 g	about 50 g per meal + 25 g snack

If that number looks big, don't jump straight to it. Add 20 to 30 grams a day each week until you're there. Track it in MyFitnessPal for two weeks so you know where you really stand.

The protein-first plate

Build every meal in this order, and eat it in this order too: protein first, then everything else.

1. **Protein (start here):** a palm-to-hand-sized portion, 30 to 50 g. Chicken, fish, lean beef, eggs plus egg whites, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu.
2. **Vegetables (fill half the plate):** anything you like. Volume and fiber keep you full.
3. **Smart carbs (a cupped hand):** potatoes, rice, oats, fruit, beans, whole-grain bread. Have more around your workouts.
4. **Fat (a thumb or two):** olive oil, avocado, nuts, cheese. It adds up fast, so measure it.

When you eat out or grab something on the go, ask one question: where's the protein? Find it first, then build around it.

A week of protein-first ideas

Each day lands around 130 to 145 g of protein. If your number is higher, bump up the protein portion at each meal; if it's lower, trim the snack. Protein amounts are approximate.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack	Protein (approx.)
1	1 cup plain Greek yogurt + 1 scoop protein powder + berries (45 g)	Grilled chicken salad, 5 oz chicken (45 g)	5 oz salmon, roasted potatoes, green beans (33 g)	1 cup cottage cheese (25 g)	148 g
2	2 eggs + 1 cup egg whites, scrambled with veggies (38 g)	Burrito bowl, 5 oz 93% lean ground beef + black beans (40 g)	Sheet-pan chicken thighs, 5 oz, with peppers and onions (35 g)	Protein shake (25 g)	138 g
3	Overnight protein oats: oats + 1 scoop protein + ½ cup Greek yogurt (40 g)	Tuna salad made with Greek yogurt, on greens or toast (35 g)	Shrimp stir-fry, 6 oz shrimp, over rice (40 g)	2 string cheese + 1 oz jerky (24 g)	139 g
4	1 cup cottage cheese with fruit + 2 hard-boiled eggs (37 g)	Leftover shrimp stir-fry (40 g)	Turkey meatballs, 5 oz, with marinara and zucchini noodles (35 g)	Single-serve Greek yogurt + almonds (18 g)	130 g
5	Protein shake + banana + 1 egg (32 g)	Chicken Caesar with Greek yogurt dressing, 5 oz chicken (45 g)	5 oz lean steak, baked potato, broccoli (40 g)	½ cup cottage cheese (13 g)	130 g
6	Egg-white omelet: 1 cup whites + 1 egg + veggies (32 g)	1½ cups turkey and bean chili (35 g)	6 oz cod, rice, asparagus (38 g)	Protein shake (25 g)	130 g
7	Greek yogurt parfait with protein granola (40 g)	Eating out: grilled chicken sandwich or bowl (38 g)	Rotisserie chicken, 5 oz, with a big salad (40 g)	Jerky + string cheese (20 g)	138 g

Cook once, eat twice: day 3's stir-fry is day 4's lunch, and a rotisserie chicken covers two or three meals.

Substitution sheet

Don't love something on the menu? Swap within the same row and your protein stays about the same. Approximate protein per serving is shown in parentheses.

Category	Swap any of these
Poultry (5 oz cooked)	Chicken breast (45 g) · chicken thighs (35 g) · ground turkey 93% (35 g) · rotisserie chicken, skin off (40 g)
Fish and seafood (5–6 oz cooked)	Salmon (33 g) · cod or tilapia (35 g) · shrimp (40 g) · canned tuna, 1 can (35 g)
Red meat (5 oz cooked)	93% lean ground beef (35 g) · sirloin steak (40 g) · pork tenderloin (40 g)
Eggs and dairy	2 eggs + 1 cup egg whites (38 g) · 1 cup Greek yogurt (23 g) · 1 cup cottage cheese (25 g) · 2 string cheese (14 g)
Plant protein	Extra-firm tofu, 8 oz (40 g) · tempeh, 4 oz (21 g) · lentils, 1 cup (18 g) · edamame, 1 cup (18 g)
Quick grabs	Protein shake (25 g) · beef or turkey jerky, 1 oz (10 g) · protein bar (15–20 g) · single-serve Greek yogurt (15 g)
Carbs (cupped hand)	Potatoes · rice · oats · whole-grain bread · fruit · beans
Fats (a thumb or two)	Olive oil · avocado · nuts or nut butter · cheese

The goal isn't to follow a meal plan forever. It's to learn to build your own meals that hit your number, and this sheet is how you start.

Protein-first grocery list

Stock these and you can build any day in this guide.

- ☐ Chicken breasts or thighs, plus a rotisserie chicken
- ☐ 93% lean ground beef or ground turkey
- ☐ Salmon, cod or frozen shrimp
- ☐ Canned tuna or chicken
- ☐ Eggs and a carton of liquid egg whites
- ☐ Plain Greek yogurt (large tub and single-serve cups)

- ☐ Cottage cheese
- ☐ String cheese
- ☐ Protein powder
- ☐ Jerky
- ☐ Tofu, tempeh, lentils or edamame (if you eat plant-based)
- ☐ Vegetables for half your plate, fresh or frozen
- ☐ Potatoes, rice, oats, fruit
- ☐ Olive oil, avocado, nuts

Your next step

Knowing your number is the easy part. Hitting it week after week, while life happens, is where most women get stuck, and it's exactly what coaching is for.

When you work with me, I build your meals around your goal and the foods you actually like, review your MyFitnessPal log, write your strength program, and check in with you every week. You'll have a real person in your corner, not another app.

Request your free consult at nextphasephysique.com. We'll talk about where you are, where you want to be, and whether coaching is the right fit. No pressure.

Here's to your next phase.

Jill McCracken Next Phase Physique