

Protein Bars and You

Are protein bars a good choice for a quick, nutritious snack?

In our fast-paced lives, protein bars have become a quick, readily available snack choice for many people, but it's important to know that most popular protein bars are high in fat, sugars and artificial sweeteners. Reading labels, and knowing what you are reading, is important here.

Sugar in all its forms has over 30 different names. These include cane juice, barley syrup, caramel, glucose, syrup, sorghum, molasses and even honey. And while sugar itself is not bad, when five of the 10 listed ingredients are sugar in its various forms, and they are listed first on the label (remember, ingredients are listed in descending order from most to least amounts), you can bet almost three quarters of the bar is sugar. (The average Canadian eats **100 pounds of sugar** per year!).

Artificial sweeteners are another dangerous addition to many protein bars, including aspartame, sorbitol, sucralose, acesulfame potassium, or maltitol, to name a few. And while they are touted as 'zero calorie' and 'no carbs', it is this very fact that makes them dangerous. Studies show they get lodged in organs and tissues (in particular the digestive area, which as we know is where our immune system originates). As well, artificial sweeteners have been shown to make us hungrier because they do not act on our 'hunger control area' and turn it off when appropriate, probably because of the presence of these 'empty calories'. So eating artificial sweeteners can actually lead to over-eating.

Finally, trans fats are a dangerous addition, and they're found in most snack foods, so you should take extreme caution with these. And labels don't adequately reflect whether a food has trans fats or not. That's because if a food has less than 2 gms of trans fats *in an single serving size*, the manufacturers are legally allowed to say it has NO trans fats, so the label would have a big, fat '0' in the trans fat count column. (Oreo cookies were the first to use this trick, blessed by Health Canada). When in doubt, look for the word '*hydrogenated*' on the label, a synonym for trans fats.

If you're looking for a nutritious snack, whole foods are still your best bet. Fifteen almonds have over 14 grams of protein. And while an apple or a banana may not have a lot protein in them, they are a valuable source of complex carbs, vitamins and minerals. Or, choose a protein bar whose label you can read and understand, with few ingredients and no artificial sweeteners or trans fats. The best course of action is to read labels. If it's too good to be true, it probably is.

Try these healthy bars available at your local health food store (and they taste great!)

Tip - eat only ½ bar at a time. Bars are still carb-heavy, thus they can impact insulin levels:

- Larabar
- Elev 8 Me
- Garden of Life – Perfect Food Bars
- Veganique
- Greens+
- Nutrilean+
- Oskri
- Organic Food Bar