



# 25-Year-Old Bodybuilding Mom Reportedly Dies Of Protein Overdose

delish Kaitlin Menza, Delish • August 16, 2017

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Photo credit: Instagram/@meeganheff

## From Delish

She was young, only 25 years old, seemingly healthy, a bodybuilder and mother of two. But now Meegan Hefford of Mandurah, Australia is dead, reportedly from the effects of a previously undiagnosed urea cycle disorder-her body had an issue metabolizing protein properly. She was working toward a bodybuilding competition this fall and regularly guzzling protein shakes. "I said to her, 'I think you're doing too much at the gym, calm down, slow it down,'" her mother, Michelle White, told her local newspaper, Perth Now.

Giant buckets of protein supplements and powders are a frequent sight in modern gyms, or in the homes of those who are professional athletes or ordinary Crossfitters alike. But they're an unnecessary addition, say the nutritionists who spoke to Delish, because it's actually really easy to get the daily recommended amount of protein.

"The DRI (Dietary Reference Intake) is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight, or 0.36 grams per pound. This amounts to roughly 56 grams per day for the average sedentary man or 46 grams per day for the average sedentary woman," says Megan Gilmore, a Certified Nutritionist Consultant and founder of Detoxinista. "Many Americans, particularly men, already consume



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much more than this—a cup of chopped chicken has 38 grams of protein on its own!"

It's hard to give a baseline recommendation when it comes to protein because so much of the calculation depends on a person's very precise weight and activity level. "At this point, there isn't enough research to say "never go beyond X grams of protein," says [Maya Rams Murthy](#), MPH, RD. "In healthy individuals, overdoing it on protein has more to do with the *sources* of protein versus the amount." Most of the negative impacts of protein are linked to animal proteins, so overeating steak or eggs as opposed to kale.

But does a person have to be like Rocky, eating a dozen raw eggs a day, to overdo it on protein? Not really. "The majority of healthy individuals are likely getting more protein than they need," Murthy says, "but not enough to be considered dangerous."

"As I understand it, the body can only absorb and utilize so much protein at one time, so while people do need sufficient protein, more is not necessarily better," Gilmore continues. "I think eating 'too much' protein can become an issue if a person isn't also getting an adequate supply of other important nutrients in his or her diet, like those found in fresh fruits and vegetables."

The signs of protein-processing issues can be troubling in their subtlety, especially if someone is routinely going HAM at the gym. "If an individual is experiencing any kind of symptoms like repeated headaches, nausea, or vomiting after eating a protein-heavy meal, they should talk to their physician about checking their ammonia levels," Murthy says.

So is it possible that the Australian woman ate too much protein, leading to her urea cycle issues and eventual death? No, say our experts, because urea cycle disorder is genetic. Hefford may have been unaware of her own illness, and then exasperated it by taking supplements of the very nutrient her body couldn't process properly.

"Urea cycle disorder is a general term for several rare genetic disorders that affect LESS than .003% (or about 1 in 35,000) of the U.S. population. People who have this type of disorder are lacking in one of six enzymes that help clear ammonia (a byproduct from protein metabolism that is toxic) from your system," says Murthy. "While adults can go years with an undiagnosed mild urea cycle disorder, several cumulative events can cause the ammonia to reach dangerous levels (like injury + illness + large and fast overload of protein from food and supplements)."

If you're worried about your consumption of protein, talk with your doctor about your diet or consider a blood test. And as always, stick to real food.



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"For the average person, a safe bet is to get your protein from whole food sources, such as lean meat, eggs, nuts, dark leafy greens, and/or legumes, rather than reaching for a concentrated or synthetic protein supplement," Gilmore says, "because it's hard to know exactly what's in them and I think it could be easier to over-do it with a supplement. It's hard to go wrong with real food!"

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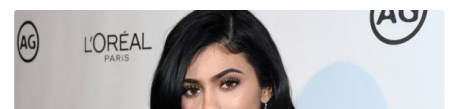
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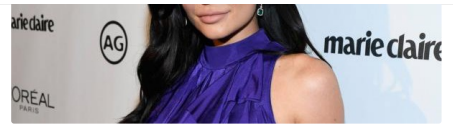
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