

What is the Protein+ Trend for Sports Performance?

As a freelance journalist with decades of sports nutrition expertise for elite and professional athletes, I was recently invited to speak to 30 media dietitians at the Nutrition News Update (NNU) Conference. The subject was on the next phase of sports performance nutrition and how to write about it. The focus was on the emerging concept of **Protein+**. I thought it was a conversation worth sharing more broadly, so I've summarized some of the key takeaways in this edition of The Plate.

Protein will always be foundational, but it is no longer the edge. Combining protein plus other functional nutrients is what's next for athletes and performance focused individuals.

Protein+ is a simple concept: it pairs high quality protein with other functional nutrients that improve how the body responds to that meal or snack. Given that [gut-friendly foods and fiber are important to over half of consumers, according to Datassential's 2026 trends](#), this is how a protein plus fiber concept could come to life.

In practice, an effective Protein+ combination starts with a high-quality dairy protein anchor and layers in a fiber-rich or functional add-in for meals and snacks that are both practical and enjoyable. An 8-ounce serving of milk provides about 8 grams of complete protein along with calcium and vitamin D. Adding oats, beans, or berries increases fiber, which can help support satiety and more stable blood sugar. For those with lactose intolerance, options like [lactose-free milk, yogurt with live and active cultures, and aged cheeses](#) can still fit well within this approach.

How is Protein+ Different from Protein “Maxxing”?

Protein maxxing focuses on pushing protein intake as high as possible. That is no longer a stand-alone differentiator for sports performance. For athletes, the shift is from simply meeting protein needs to optimizing how that protein is used. Start with high-quality protein to support muscle repair, recovery, and adaptation. Then build around it with the right nutrients to better support energy, digestion, and overall performance.

Protein+ Combinations and Performance Outcomes

- Fiber for satiety and blood sugar regulation
- Carbohydrates for recovery and glycogen replenishment
- Micronutrients for muscle function and overall health

Why are Dairy Foods a Top Choice for Protein+ Meals and Snacks?

When building a Protein+ meal or snack, the first decision is the protein source. [Dairy foods consistently stand out. Milk, yogurt, and cheese provide complete protein](#), meaning they contain all nine essential amino acids required for muscle repair and growth. They also provide nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and B vitamins that support performance and overall health. What makes dairy particularly effective is how the protein is delivered.

Real Milk Proteins <i>Together they create a natural fast and slow protein system, highly effective for recovery and maintaining muscle</i>	
Whey Digests relatively quickly and supports muscle protein synthesis, especially around training	Casein Digests more slowly and helps support sustained amino acid delivery and satiety

How to Build a Dairy Protein + Fiber Meal or Snack in 3 Simple Steps?

- 1: Start with a Dairy Protein Anchor.** Use yogurt, cottage cheese, milk, whey or kefir to provide complete protein, calcium and vitamin D.
- 2: Add a Functional Plus with Fiber.** Pair dairy base with oats, berries or beans to slow digestion and promote blood-sugar control.
- 3: Finish with Extra Flavor.** Top creation with spices (cinnamon, nutmeg), savory seasonings or sweet garnishes to make it even more enjoyable and satisfying.

What are 5 Low-Cost Protein + Fiber Combinations for Athletes?

Remember that consistency is one of the biggest drivers of performance. Versatility, accessibility and affordability make it easier to build sustainable habits. Dairy foods are easy to find, work in both sweet and savory meals, before or after training, and as part of a daily routine. Plus, they are an affordable high-quality protein anchor. See these costs, pairing options and protein+ benefits.

DAIRY PROTEIN + COST	PLUS-UP FIBER COMBINATION	PROTEIN+ FUNCTIONAL BENEFITS
Non-fat, Plain Yogurt 1 Cup 10.7g Protein for \$0.93	Combine yogurt with oats for a grab and go overnight oats breakfast	Slow digestion, keep blood sugar and hunger steady
Cottage Cheese (2%) ½ Cup 12g Protein for \$0.83	Top cottage cheese with apple slices and cinnamon for a sweet-savory snack.	May help lower LDL cholesterol and support gut health
Whole Milk Ricotta ½ Cup 8g Protein for \$0.93	Spread ricotta on whole grain toast , drizzle with balsamic glaze, add tomatoes, basil for lunch	Bone health, help stabilize blood sugar
Real Milk, Whole 1 ¼ cup 11.25g Protein for \$0.47	Stir 1 oz chia seeds , honey, and cinnamon into milk and let it thicken into a pudding for dessert	Bone and muscle health, increased satiety, slower digestion
Sharp Cheddar Cheese 2 Ounces 12g Protein for \$0.69	Melt shredded cheddar over seasoned black beans or stuff into a tortilla for a family friendly dinner	May support muscle health, improve blood sugar control, gut health

Protein is not going anywhere, but how we use it is evolving. For athletes and performance-focused individuals, the next step is not simply increasing intake, it is building meals that

actually support recovery, energy, and consistency over time. That is where Protein+ becomes practical and dairy is the perfect natural fit.

In many cases, it comes down to simple combinations built around high-quality protein and foods that enhance how the body responds.

I'm interested to see how this continues to evolve and how others are thinking about applying it with their athletes or clients.

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* Costs are approximate based on average retail pricing. Protein amounts are approximate, check nutrition facts labels for exact amounts.

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